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Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARCH *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER — *Avram Davidson,* EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Introduction to Edward Wellen's SEVEN DAY'S WONDER

Once upon a time, in the Holy City of Jerusalem, we met a prophetess, a white-haired woman who was mad in many languages, living and dead, and who cried aloud—as others had done before her, on the same hallowed hills—her message. Which was, that Male without Female is nothing, that both principles exist in the Godhead, that one must say not only, "Our Father, Our King," *but also,* "Our Mother, Our Queen"; *and that these two Divine Essences are exemplified —in the physical world—by the positive and negative charges of electricity. The Jerusalem in which she preached, however, is the one which is in Asia, not the one which is in Heaven; and it was not prepared to hearken overlong to an old woman who skimmed along the streets crying,* "Electricity! Divine power! Divine love!" *Time passed, we forgot her, we forgot her message, we descended from Mount Zion, and eventually we became an editor and received the MSS of this story which —for the first time in a decade—linked before us phophecy and electricity. Do not laugh. The Philistines thought David mad . . . Edward Wellen is a writer by occupation, his stories have appeared in many Science Fiction and crime fiction magazines, in PLAYBOY, on TV, and—and no less than four of them—in the Gnome Press anthology,* All About The Future. *He lives in New Rochelle and lists as his interest,* "psychosomatosemantics, *particularly the branch* psychosomatosemitosemantics." *His story is about Gillian Ebon, who was charged with the Word in more ways than one; of Casey Knapp, who had probably never heard of Gehazi, of Milly Henry, she of the varnished eyes and mincing gait; and of what befell them all in the harlot city by the marge of the western sea.*

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SEVEN DAY'S WONDER

by Edward Wellen

THOUGH IT SHOOK ALL THE way from Phoenix the auto deferred breaking down and reached Los Angeles. And when I saw the lights, strings of pearls clasping the throat of the harlot city, I said, "This will do."

So Jan Sobotka stopped the auto and it idled and shook. But his wife said, "Why don't you let us take you on in?"

But I said, "I will walk. I must meditate." And I set foot on the ground.

And she said, "I don't get all you say but I know it's good. O, I wish we was rich, so I could do something for you."

So I said, "You have done much for me."

Then she said, "You sure you'll be all right? You're so helpless like. Like a lamb." And her eyes filled.

I said, "I place my trust in the Lord."

She could say no more but pressed my hand between rough hands and left in my palm a folded paper that I later saw was a ten dollar bill. Jan Sobotka cleared his throat but said nothing.

I made my sign of blessing, stretching out thumb and first and second fingers of the right hand at right angles to one another.

Then the auto pulled away and its gears gnashed. The woman waved but Jan Sobotka did not look back but sped the auto away.

And I sorrowed that my message had in no wise pierced his resistance and I blamed not him but myself. And I walked and remembered a happening. On one of his stops for coffee, to break the spell of highways by day and headlights by night, I came from the rest room and found the auto gone. I waited with folded arms and soon it came back and stopped and I stepped in and it wheeled and went on. And Jan Sobotka said, "I thought you was laying down in the back." But the woman was sitting apart from him and she gave him a look and then smiled at me, her eyes and her cheeks bright.

And I walked and thought how another time, while his forefinger poked and circled in his worn little purse for the coins to pay for our coffee and currant buns, his lips moved silently. And I swirled the cup to stir the

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muddy broth and watched him sadly. For men have reviled me often and I divined what was in his mind. My talk seemed to him wild and strange and he would deliver himself of me. So it was no shock when the woman and I returned from looking at a caged coyote, who squatted with head on forepaws, eyes bright and sick, and sat in the auto and it rattled as it would shake apart. And Jan Sobotka said, "Sounds like the whole rear end." And the woman said, "How can we pay for it?" He stopped the car at a crossing and said to me, "Guess you better get another lift. Me and the missus has to find a garage and wait repairs. Sorry to see you go." But I waited with folded arms and watched him and suffered for him. And after a minute he went around the auto kicking and tapping and at last pulled off a hub cap and took out three loose bolts. And he said, "What you know. Someone want to jest, that is." He turned from my eyes and picked up a lump that had fallen when he kicked a fender and he cracked it and gazed at the soil inside and crumbled it away slowly and he seemed sad.

But he was not so sad as I felt now visioning him vanishing unsaved into the city. So I walked mourning and as I walked the darkness lifted and I saw the eyelids of the day.

And I looked and saw I was by a filling station. Beside it was a used car lot where a great sign stood showing a Jezebel disporting and saying, in the shape of a funneling cloud, "Drive a bargain!" I looked away from the sign and saw, at the side of the filling station, a tap, and it dripped. And I went and placed my hand on the tap.

But a man in a gray uniform said, "And what do you think you're doing?"

So I said, "I thirst."

The man's face grew red and he said, "Next you'll want a handout. All you bums think this here's the promised land, everything for nothing and on a silver charger. I had to work hard for what I got."

I said, "I thirst."

But the man's face grew redder and he said, "Mosey on."

Just then a tank truck drove up beside me and the driver leaned out and laughed and said, "What's going on, Jel?"

And the man in gray said, "Ah, look what wants curb service."

So I took my hand from the tap and walked away, desiring to shake off the dust of that place.

But the adamant man said, "And don't come around again or I'll have the bulls boot you into Tomorrowland."

And the driver, hooking the hose to the filling pipe, laughed.

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I turned and raised my hand and opened my mouth to speak.

But a shining Fiat charged onto the blacktop and slid to a stop by a pump and the driver sounded his horn and called out, "What about action?"

And the man in gray, standing with the truck driver by the filling pipe, would have gone to him but I lifted up my voice and cried out, "You have given me water of gall to drink. Surely you have heaped coals of fire on your own head. The Lord will level this place with the ground."

So saying, I moved toward the two men and pointed my finger. And a spark leaped from my hand and the sky flamed and charred.

The blast flung me far but I had no hurt. The blast felled the sign and lay flat the Jezebel and on her head a tire, like a black halo. And I looked and saw the two men were consumed as stubble. And I groaned, for I rejoiced not at the destruction of them that hated me.

And I looked for the driver of the Fiat and a voice behind my shoulder said, "Man, you made me sweat a puddle." And I turned and saw a young man with curly hair and a floating eye. And he said, "We both escaped with the skin of our teeth."

I said, "Praise be to God."

He said, "Man, look at my heap."

The searing heat drove us away. People were gathering and there came a sound like a wail and the young man turned to me and said, "Quick, what's your name?"

So I said, "Gillian Ebon."

"Where you staying?"

I said, "I only now came to the city and have nowhere to lay my head."

Then he said, "Aha. Why I ask, the cops find you're a vagrant they'll jug you and seal the stopper. So you're an old pal, Gillian, and you're staying with me. Let me do the talking."

The oily smoke thickened and less flame flickered through and the air stank. An officer drew us aside. Men carried away the shrouded shapes and I murmured prayers for their souls.

Then I saw the officer was speaking to me, but the young man broke in and said, "Can't you see he's in a state of shock? He's Gillian Ebon, friend of mine."

And the officer said, "And who are you?"

The young man said, "Casey Knapp."

The officer said, "The disc jockey? On KALE?"

And Casey Knapp said, "The same." He smiled, then said, "Man!" And he looked at his wrist watch and shook it and bits of crystal fell and he said, "What time is it, Lieut?"

The officer said, "Sergeant. Six-seventeen."

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And Casey Knapp said, "Man, there goes my job. How about picking up on us after I do my show, Sarge?"

The officer licked a pencil stub and wrote and let us go.

Casey Knapp said, "It's only a few blocks, Gillian." And we walked. He eyed me a while and then said, "You really dig that religious jazz, don't you? What I mean is, you're deeply devout."

So I said, "I came from the Bible Belt and my father taught me Bible and Belt." And I saw my father, patriarchal, bestriding the red carpet, fire in his eyes and voice, and my mother, dim in the shadows.

Then Casey Knapp said, "What do you work at?"

I said, "I have worked with cotton gin and with threshing machine, I have labored in mine and in factory. But now I go to and fro upon the earth and where I find need of the Word and of healing there I tarry for a time."

And Casey Knapp said, "And what do you do for money?"

So I said, "I take no thought for the morrow. I have feasted and I have fasted."

We passed on by an undertaker's. Casey Knapp pulled higher the zipper tab on his jacket, and he said, "Now, this—this curse business. Anything like it happen before?"

I said, "Wherever I have worked there were explosions and fires."

He said, "Aha!" Then he smiled and said, "Know why you're a jonah?"

And he would have gone on but I said, "There was a fire in a paper plant and a man tested the workers for voltage. Then he told the foreman to let me go. For he said I have exceedingly dry skin and sweat amazingly little and so build up a thirty-thousand—volt charge in my body." Casey Knapp gave a slanting nod and pushed out his lips. And I said, "So I went home and fell on my knees and said, 'Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the beak of the vulture Thou hast set upon me.' And I prayed long and the light failed and I was plunging to despair. But then like the passing of a cold breath of air across dark waters the brooding spirit wakened its wings and passed before my face. And the hair of my flesh stood up and as a lightning flash I saw into the soul of things. And I saw the world is charged."

Casey Knapp said, "Charged?"

And I said, "Is it not said, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God? Did not all being begin with a bolt of lightning? It struck the sea and the sea conceived. All is charged. The words that tell of charge are themselves charged. The ampere is produced by one watt acting through one ohm and it is equal to one coulomb per second and its sign is I. And I-ampere is by interpre-

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tation God the Father, and watt is What the Ineffable, and coulomb is by interpretation Dove, which is to say the Holy Ghost, and ohm has the sound of *homme,* which is Man. In short, I saw that God is Electricity. And I said weeping, 'Why me, O Lord, why me?' But His will I will not resist. I am fearfully and wonderfully made to carry the Word." Then after silence I said to Casey Knapp, "And what of you?"

He said, "What? O, nothing much. I saw the light of day in Toledo O then moved to Cairo III and then here. I missed out on the fighting—bum ticker. I became a disc jockey."

I said, "You seem young to have gained material success."

He smiled and said, "O, I'm precocious all right. Like Job; he cursed the day he was born. But success? D.j. on a small station?" He smiled again and said, "Why I was buying go-juice early in the morning, an even gallon holds more gas after a night of cooling." He took my elbow. "Here we are," he said.

We passed through a revolving door and he led me to a room. Behind glass a man was pacing and worry writ a stave across his brow. He halted when he saw us and pointed to a clock.

Casey Knapp smiled and told me to sit and he went behind the glass and talked to the man. The man pulled at his nose and the stave graved deeper but the man gave a shrug and a nod. And Casey Knapp came back and shucked his coat and sat near me at a desk on which a microphone stood. And he picked up a sheet of paper and looked at it and laughed and tore it in two. But then he held the pieces and showed me the writing.

He said, "Cue sheet. Tells what comes when. My gimmick is to make records tell a story. Like so."

And I looked where he pointed and I read, *Get Thee Behind Me, Satan* (Will Bradley), *Scratch My Back* (Variety Seven), *It Feels Good* (John Kirby).

Then he said, "But I'm not using those records today. You'll see why." And he looked up and waited. Then the man pointed a finger at him and he spoke. "Folks, this is Casey Knapp again, bringing this generation, that generation, every generation the beat. No commercials today, for I went to share a very special experience with you." And his voice trembled as he told of witnessing me pronounce a curse and its fulfillment in holocaust. And he told of talking with me and of finding I had spoken with the eternal amid lightnings. And he said, "Say, wouldn't it be wonderful, folks, if we could get Gillian to use his wonder-working power in blessing, in healing? Let me hear from you."

And he looked at the man and I heard *Rock of Ages* begin.

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Casey Knapp turned a switch on his microphone and spoke to me. "Gillian, here's your chance to spread the Word before more people than you've reached in all your wandering. What do you say?"

So I said, "So be it," feeling sad pride, humble joy.

And Casey Knapp said, "You have a set speech, a text?"

But I said, "When the spirit is on me I know not what I do till I do it."

Casey Knapp nodded and said, "That's all right. Just electrify 'em." And he switched on his microphone and looked at the man and made a sign of cutting his throat. The hymn faded away and he said, "And now, folks, it is with deepest reverence that I tell you . . . the next voice you hear . . . will be that of . . . Gillian Ebon, the Messenger of Electricity." And he pointed his finger at me.

A strange voice filled the room and I saw it was the voice of the man behind the glass. And he said, "You're in for it, Casey. I told you." And he pointed to the ceiling. "Right away."

But Casey Knapp smiled and his chair squeaked and he put his heels on his desk and his hands behind his head.

The man shook his head and soured his mouth and then dusted his hands. He eyed me strangely and went.

Then Casey Knapp unlocked his hands and swung his feet to the floor and said, "Do I sense a bargain?"

I put out my hand and we shook hands.

And Casey Knapp said, "The boss is Gjelbert Kreshmet. He'll want to horn in, but I'll handle him."

We smoked for a space and then Casey Knapp led me up stairs and stopped before a door.

He said, "Scuff the rug when you cross to shake his hand."

But I said, "Not so. There will be no guile."

And he nodded and said, "So be it."

And we walked in. A young woman at a blinking switchboard saw Casey Knapp and rolled her eyes up and waved him on. She saw me and put a hand over the mouthpiece and said, "This the Messenger of Electricity?"

And Casey Knapp said, "The same."

She kept her hand over the phone and looked until we were in an inner room.

Casey Knapp made toward a heavy man at a desk and leaned and breathed hard in his face. The man drew back but smelled with delicately quivering nostrils. And the man said, "All right, you're sober. But I thought I hired a d.j., not a j.d."

Casey Knapp said, "Gjelbert Kreshmet meet Gillian Ebon."

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And I moved lightly across the rug and shook Gjelbert Kreshmet's hand.

He sized me as I were goods. Then a beryl winked as he shook his finger. And he said, "Now, I want none of your lip, Casey. Is what you said true?"

Casey Knapp crossed his heart.

Gjelbert Kreshmet said, "You know how much dumping the commercials cost the station?"

Casey Knapp closed his eyes wearily.

Gjelbert Kreshmet said, "Well, you gambled and won. The response is astounding. Even a sponsor biting."

But Casey Knapp said, "No sponsors."

Gjelbert Kreshmet's mouth flew open.

Casey Knapp said, "Believers are going to send in to build a Temple of Electricity."

Gjelbert Kreshmet smiled nodding and said, "I've underrated you, Casey." And he drew a form from a drawer and said, "Now, merely to make everything legal—"

But Casey Knapp said, "Gillian is hen-tracking nothing. His Word is his bond."

And Gjelbert Kreshmet lifted heavy lids and said, "I've really underrated you."

Soon Casey Knapp and I left. And he looked at my clothing and said, "Your Sunday best?"

So I said, "I am wearing all my belongings."

And he said, "We'll get you new threads." And he fitted me out in a store, choosing an electric blue suit, and then took me to his rooms and left me to bathe and change, saying, "When this thing gets off the ground you'll have your own place and a real wardrobe."

But I thought, What, shall I frivol thinking on such? There is the Word, the Word, the Word!

In an hour Casey Knapp phoned and told me where to meet him. It was a loft he leased for a meeting place. We walked worn planking and it echoed, but he said, "Man, I can see it jumping."

A woman said, "There's a crowd now."

And I turned and saw she was fair to look upon. But when she drew near she walked mincing, and her eyes lured; she had shaped them like almonds.

Then Casey Knapp said, "Milly Henry meet Gillian Ebon. Milly's taking charge of the mail."

And she gazed smiling and I thought, Would good had evil's lure. And she seemed quick to sense my feelings, for a flush rose beneath her paint. Then I greeted her kindly, for there is none not worth saving.

Casey Knapp took hold of her arm and said, "You may not suspect it, Gillian, but Milly is really a very religious-minded girl."

And she said, "That's a hot—" but she stopped and a look of pain came over her face.

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And Casey Knapp said, "She's from the Bible Belt too."

She took a step away from him and said, "The men mostly wore galluses."

He said, "Can it."

She leaned to me and said, "Spoke out of turn. Big Wheel doesn't like."

He said frowning, "Do something for me."

And she said, "You're so sweet when you want something."

He said, "Get some eats. Gillian, what'll you have?"

So I said, "Lime juice and graham crackers."

She gazed at me gravely then turned quickly to Casey Knapp.

He said, "O, anything."

And she winked at me and minced away. So Casey Knapp and I talked of where the seats would stand and when the meetings would take place. Then Milly Henry came back with food and handed me mine, saying, "No lime, tangerine." And she handed Casey Knapp a deviled egg sandwich and black coffee and took for herself a lettuce-and-tomato sandwich and a wedge of apple pie and a small container of milk. And we ate sitting on empty packing cases.

Casey Knapp said, "Let the belly transubstantiate and let us make plans."

And we talked. And I said I would give of my power freely. And Casey Knapp said we positively must not charge for it but we would allow people to give to help spread the Word and the healing.

And he mused and said ancient Egyptian temples had slot machines to vend holy water. And he spoke of Tibetan prayerwheels that turned in the streams to generate prayers. And he said those inventions were forerunners of my own harnessing of science to religion. And he said, "We'll mass produce faith. The thing is to advertise you, sell you."

But I sighed and said, "My Father's business is not a thing of buying and selling."

He smiled and said, "Bingo!" Then with fair words and soft speech he drew a vision of the good works we would do.

And I said, "So be it."

He sowed my fame broadcast and the following night the loft trembled under the multitude. But on the eve of that he would have done a shocking thing.

I found him hanging many old crutches and leg braces and canes of the disabled upon the walls as signs of cures. I waxed wrathful and he sought to justify the thing, saying, "You know how they start off a collection plate." And he turned to Milly Henry, who was combing her amber hair, and it was crackling, and said, "Isn't that right?"

But she said, "It isn't right—but it's so."

Yet I held firm and he took

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them down. And I sought to console him, saying true signs would hang in their place.

And they did, a legion of them. For they came, the lame and the halt. And my heart went out to them, but with love, not pity, for pity is to scorn as sleep is to death. And faith won out over pain, ending fits and restoring seeing and hearing and feeling. And Electricity bore my message and my image across the land. And the gatherings grew.

And I won followers, such as Alec Tyron, who stayed after the first meeting ended and came to me and removed his hat, revealing a shock of baldness, and wept with gladness and begged to serve. He was an electrician and we put him in charge of wiring and the like. And Casey Knapp had him install air conditioning, saying that relief from smog made for readier belief.

And I preached the Word and showed how every word is charged. Sometimes I begin by raising a text. "Six times the wording is, while the world was in the making is, 'And God saw every thing good.' The seventh time the wording is, 'And God saw every thing that he had made and behold, it was *very* good. 'What does *very* mean but that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts?" And sometimes the spirit seized me straightway.

We held three meetings daily and went from strength to strength. Casey Knapp urged me to meet privately those he called useful contacts, men and women of standing, for he said he right connections were all-important. But I told him we are all of the same clay and there would be no respecting of persons. But they came also in their turn.

But the healing devoured my being. Times my voice gave out. And the third evening I came back of the curtain wholly drained.

Milly Henry undid her kerchief and passed it across my brow, but the kerchief scarecly grew damp.

Casey Knapp said, "Veronica wiped."

Milly Henry turned varnished eyes on him and his smile vanished. And she passed the kerchief across my brow again gently.

A noise like the rushing of mighty waters filled my ears. And then I came back to my strength.

Casey Knapp was saying, "You're beat, Gillian. You know yourself the human body is a condenser. What you need is charging. I'll have Alec rig up something."

And my mind was in a mist and I let him persuade me.

But when the time came, Milly Henry was loud in protest, saying, "This thing goes up to thirty thousand volts. I looked it up; they only use two thousand in the electric chair."

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Yet I had faith, I had belief in a higher power, and when the curtain rose and the needle on the voltmeter swung far over and the gathering drew quick breath I grasped the bare wires.

And the higher power charged my veins, my blood caught fire, and that day I healed many. And it was the same the next day and the next.

But I saw too that Alec Tryon's manner was strange. And I thought, Out of early contact comes a sense of owning and out of seeming disregard comes a feeling of hurt. So I sought him out and strove to encourage him and strengthen him with my words. But he smiled without understanding and kept his eyes on his work and it troubled me. For he was splicing wires as I talked, and as I talked I thought sadly. What is understanding but seeing connections?

And Milly Henry changed also. From the first all she said and did, and all she did not say and do, rubbed me the wrong way, as if of purpose to repel. But latterly even in her mocking she seemed to be kicking against the pricks of conscience.

Casey Knapp said, "You're a bad influence, Gillian. Of late she's been coming early. If that makes sense. But that isn't the worst of it. She told me to watch my language." And he seemed shocked.

Soon after that she saw me watching her scratch her arm and she smiled and said, "I've a rash liking for strawberries." Then her hand stilled and she said, "Would the itching end if I believed?"

And I nodded, too full to speak.

She looked as if she would say more but turned instead to a newspaper and read for a time and then threw it aside, saying, "And for that they chop down forests."

I came early next morning and found her there and said, "Good morning."

But she said, "Oh morning," with no spark gap between. "What's good about it?"

And I saw she was in heaviness of heart. But I knew not what to say to comfort her. And I went out to the gathering.

Then the rented organ swelled and rose and I grasped the wires and the spirit came on me and an electric something passed between me and the gathering and I preached the Word as I had never done.

After, among those who lingered I saw Jan Sobotka behind his woman. She said, "Do you remember us?"

I smiled at both and raised my hand in my sign of blessing. And Jan Sobotka showed in his rejoicing how he had been fearful.

And when all had gone I went with a high heart to see Casey Knapp. And I said, "Is Milly Henry your woman?"

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He looked up from a page of figures and gazed at me. Then at last he said, "Opposites do attract. Oculus-dokos, you want to spark her, go ahead."

And I went to see Milly Henry. She ran to meet me. Her footsteps were a tabor in my heart.

Her eyes were shinning and she said clasping me, "You were wonderful!"

I felt transfigured. I said, "Have I found favor in your sight?" And I murmured more into her tresses.

Then as if remembering herself she drew apart and said, "Gillian, you've made me see the light. I shall be pure in mind and soul and body." Her face was wet with tears but she seemed not to know she was weeping and smiled.

Blood sang in my ears and my temples throbbed madly and I knew my mouth was agape.

She said, "You've given me a wholly new conception of living." And as I said nothing, she said, "Aren't you proud of regenerating me? Then why are you withholding your blessing?"

And I grew angry. She could not understand why, and I grew angrier, gazing at her almond eyes and carmen lips.

She put her face in her hands and said, "Of course. I must cleanse myself. No powder, no paint." And she went out with bent neck and full eyes, and strait was her gait as she went.

And her face grew pale and thin, her papery lips moved in prayer and she was careful and troubled about many things.

On the seventh day of my stay in the city it came to me I saw Casey Knapp little. Often he forgot the time of the meetings and came late, saying he had been rapt in business. So I sought him out in his room at the far end of the loft. The rug deadened my steps. I waited.

Then he looked up from sheets of paper on his desk as at a ghost. But then he widened his mouth, that had become a coin slot, and said, "Why, hello!" He tapped the papers and said, "Man, you haven't begun to realize your potential. The world is your pearl."

A Ministering Angel passing by smiled curiously into the room. Casey Knapp rose and kicked the door shut. He lighted a brown cigarette.

Then he said, "You're going to be a force, a real power, in the state, in the nation, in the world. Have you noticed how the local politicians are hot to trot with you, with the vote you represent? No questions about the explosion, hey?"

I shivered. The voice of the tempter, the voice of pride. By that sin fell the angels. I said, "Why have I seen you little?"

He said, "Man, I'm up to my ears." He pointed to filing cabinets and said, "How'm I doing as

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Recording Angel? Soon I'll need IBM punch cards." He showed me a page of figures and said, "The wages of salvation. By fish-black we'll take in more than—" He stopped and looked at me. Then he said, "What gives?"

I said, "Why have I seen you little?"

He drew deep of brown smoke, then said, "I leave the holy bit to you. Between ourselves, I always feel uncomfortable when I hear comfortable words."

I shook my head sadly.

He took another drag and said, "You want the straight dope? Okay, why should I pander to your altar ego too? Man, you're going to need me bad when this healing jazz kicks back. Say a child dies because the parents take it to you instead of to a doctor. Who's going to cover? You stick to your department, I'll stick to mine." His hand plucked at the sheets.

I said, "At the Last Trump—"

He said, "Spades, no doubt."

I said, "At the Last Trump there will be but two departments, the sheep and the goats."

He said, "Kid yourself but don't kid me. Man, open your eyes. The world's in bad shape. It's round but it's crooked just the same. The Man Upstairs is not quite right in the upper story. If there's a Man Upstairs."

The one horror grew from the other. Yet I refrained myself. I said, "There are some things you cannot put into words. In the end we always come back to the Ineffable."

He said, "F the Ineffable."

Yet I refrained myself. I strove not to speak. I said, I will be silent. But the Word was in my heart as a burning bush and I could not forbear. I said, "You have souled yourself to the Devil."

He said, "Guilty as charged." Then he laughed and said, "Don't mind me. I'm always saying things to shock people. Doesn't mean I mean them."

I said, "Why have I seen you little?"

He crushed his cigarette and said, "You wanted Milly. I let you have her. But, damn it, I don't have to hover around watching you and that sepulchritudinous doxy together."

I said, "You love her and yet did not fight to hold her?"

He said, "Why, you psalm-singing muzzler, I could've fried you a dozen times over by letting Alec jolt real juice through those wires. But last things first. I'm thinking of what we stand to reap. Man! There are more dames. More guys like you too but I put a lot into you and I mean to cash in."

I said, "*Real* juice?"

He said, "Man, it isn't the volts that kill you, it's the amps. Alec's been giving you only a tingle." He smiled and said, "If the faithful knew that they'd hoot you out of town."

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The light became heavy darkness before my face. And I bowed down my head listening to a still small voice that became still smaller. The iron entered into my soul. I moved across the rug with a dragging step and I stretched out my hand and pointed a finger at Casey Knapp.

He said, "Don't touch me!" And he was sore afraid.

And he fell and he lay down dead at my feet.

I looked out a window. The sun seemed fixed like the bright head of a nail. I went downstairs.

Alec Tryon saw me and said, "Yes, Messenger?"

I gazed around the basement at all manner of machines.

He said, "We've come a long way since the old Leyden jars."

I said, "You think I have not faith? I have faith. Do not withhold I-Ampere from me. Will it be an easy job?"

He galvanized, his eyes shining and unquestioning. And he said, "Yes, Messenger."

Soon it will be time.

CORRECTION, PLEASE

In our August 1962 issue we printed Theodore R. Cogswell's words to the song THE ROPER, the music of which is by John Jacob Niles. Through an error in transcription our text concluded:

"For the bats, they will flee you when the Rope comes for you,
And there'll be no forgiveness on that troubled day.
Be no forgiveness on that troubled day."

The correct last stanza should be:

"Now all you fine ladies take heed to this story
And watch lest your winging should lead you astray.
For the bats they will flee you when the Roper comes for you,
And there'll be no forgiveness on that troubled day."

There have been a number of queries about purchasing the sheet music. Publisher is G. Schirmer, Inc., 609 5th Ave., N.Y.C., and the catalogue number is 10377.

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In this issue . . .

. . . are stories by **EDWARD WELLEN, DONALD E. WESTLAKE,** and **LARRY M. HARRIS** (Lawrence Jannifer), all of them well-known to afficionados of the mystery story, and all of them—so far our records, which were somewhat damaged in the Zeppelin raids of the year '15, indicate—new to these pages. New here, also, is Canadian author **D. K. FINDLAY,** with a new, wry view on the possible evolution of superman; even newer is young California Funny Man **CALVIN W. DEMMON,** humor slightly muted for (we trust) this occasion only, his first appearance in professional print. **SYDNEY VAN SCYOC,** a woman, despite the false moustache, is new only to F&SF, not to other Science Fiction magazines; and—wait! don't go away!—elsewhere-famous **HARRY HARRISON,** author of fast-moving, hard-hitting SF novels and stories, winds up our "new" list with a hilarious account of an extra-terrestrial's involvement in the Napoleonic Wars. So much for new chums. Back with us again is **RICHARD McKENNA,** whose novel of strange ways and strange life on a distant planet will intrigue and pleasure you; so is **WILL MOHLER,** whose poignant tale of frozen seas will melt the hardest heart; and so is **FRITZ LEIBER,** with a merry and not-so-merry romp with a strange, strange woman.*

Coming soon . . .

. . . and adventuring on a perilous voyage into deep space is **JAMES WHITE,** and offers a fresh view of what it may be like Out There for man, machine, and man-and-machine. **HINIYOSHI SAITO,** leading Japanese SF writer, contributes our first translation from that language. And **KIT REED** returns, taking a somewhat less than worshipful view of certain medical men, into whose healing (?) hands an other-timely emmissary chances to fall. *Nota Bene:* Just arrived and set for Spring publication: a novel, complete in one issue by **POUL ANDERSON.** Also purchased, and to follow, a **DAMON KNIGHT** novel, complete in two issues. And by "complete" we mean *Complete*—not one word has been cut from either.

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* *The joint appearance here of GORDON R. DICKSON and RANDALL GARRETT, as guest-reviewers of each other's new books, is a harmless jape on the part of Your Editor, and does not represent collusion between these two great men.*

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It is somewhat curious that this story, dealing with overpopulation, should have been written by a native of Canada, our great and good neighbor to the north, a nation with a comparatively small population and a comparatively high standard of living; rather than by a native of, say, Japan—India—or the West Indies. D. K. Findlay was born in Ontario in 1923 and practiced law in Carleton Place, a town near Ottawa, until going overseas during World War II as a correspondent for MacLean's, *the leading Canadian magazine.* (Note to MacLean's: why not a U.S. edition?) *He now lives in Ottawa and writes full time, more than fifty of his stories having appeared in the* Saturday Evening Post, Colliers *(R.I.P.),* Ladies Home Journal, MacLean's, *and other Canadian and U.S. as well as British magazines. Mr. Findlay is the author of the novels SEARCH FOR AMELIA (J. B. Lippincott Co., 1958), and THIRD ACT (Bles [Canada], 1961), and is now working on a third. He lists his amusements as "Skiing and figure skating in the winter; in the summer, moping, waiting for winter. . . ."* Explosion *is defined as* "a violent bursting; an outburst." *When an explosion occurs, things are hurled out of context, and their form is often radically changed. The author of this tale of the "population explosion" and the future, has, by the way, four children. We may be sure that they can ski and skate . . . but can they swim?*

THE DAY AFTER SATURATION

by D. K. Findlay

When Dr. Byrom, once a professor of embryology, now Director of the Department of Demography, descended to his office that morning he knew that there was trouble ahead. The communica-

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tors had been flashing all night.

His assistant was waiting for him. "Rioting in India. There's a rumor that human births have ceased there."

"There's always rioting in India. And always rumors."

"The Department of Public Order wants you to issue a statement."

Such was the state of nervous tension of the world's masses that re-assuring statements were required every few hours. This was the business of the Department of Public Order which Dr. Byrom remembered had been simply the government news service in the good old days.

"Get Dr. Yeager at Montauk One."

Montauk One was the largest maternity Centre of the area and Dr. Yeager was its director. He and Dr. Byrom were old adversaries. Dr. Yeager believed in the destiny of man and the beneficent principle in Nature. He and the optimists who shared his opinions had done much to frustrate the attempts of the Department of Demography to control population growth.

Dr. Yeager appeared on the communicator screen, genial and confident, wearing his sterile hospital uniform.

"Doctor, there's a story that human births are coming to a stop. Any sign of it at Montauk One?"

"What a question!" The Doctor laughed. "I'm happy to say that we are in full production here. Up till dawn this morning, we had our usual quota of ten thousand. Right now, we're in the midday control to give the staff a rest. Births will begin again at sixteen hours, right on schedule. We're pretty well organized here, you know."

"I do know it—to our cost."

"What's all the excitement about, Doctor? My people tell me that the streets are swarming and all circuits jammed."

"They have some reason to be nervous. Must I remind you of the date, Doctor? November 13, 2026."

"What! That old wive's tale! Surely they don't take it seriously?"

"Let me refresh your memory, Doctor. Long ago—in the year 1960—the University of Illinois published a series of predictions on the growth of world population. They were interesting because they were the first of a series of computer predictions programmed on adequate data. They predicted that the Day of Saturation—the day on which there would be no more room for human beings on earth would be November 12, 2026."

"They were wrong—as usual. Babies are still being born."

"And what a world they are being born into!"

"Not my department. My job is to bring them into the world. It's

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up to you people to find room for them."

Dr. Byrom was about to switch off but Dr. Yeager had something more to say. "I was going to call you about another matter. A matter of embryology. You told me that if ever I had an expectant mother with a sudden rise or fall in temperature and a change in the foetal heartbeat to let you know."

"You have one?"

"Yes. It looks like a premature delivery. Probably this afternoon. You'd better come and assist. Help me celebrate—it will be our millionth delivery. The state ought to give me a medal."

"The state ought to liquidate you."

"Still the pessimist, Byrom?"

Stifling his desire to shout, the Director growled, "Don't you think I've got cause to be? The history of man—"

Genuine enthusiasm shone on Dr. Yeager's face. "The history of man, exactly! Think of it! One day an ape, or ape-like creature, gave birth to a man, or man-like creature. Since then . . ."

"Since then they have given birth to so many man-like creatures that there soon won't be room for them. If," he said, gloomily, "there's room even now."

But Yeager wouldn't have it so. "Man's estate is too great, too precious," he said, sincerely. "Who knows where the next step will lead us? Out to the stars, perhaps—almost certainly. But you may be sure that man will rise to his necessity!"

Abruptly closing the conversation, Byrom said, "I'll be over this afternoon, if I can find the time."

Byrom knew it woull be a full day of conferences—futile conferences and futile announcements to the public that everything was normal. Normal—the word had lost its meaning.

His assistant entered with a folio of aerial photographs. "The report on the marinas, sir. I'm afraid things are worse than we expected."

The marinas were an unexpected development. During the latter half of the twentieth century all the available waterways had been dammed to provide hydro-electric power. Because of the silting-up of the dams and the great amount of waste dumped into the water, the drainage system had collapsed. The already over-burdened economy had been unable to cope with the problem and marshes had spread over the face of the world. The Mississippi, Nile, Congo, and Ganges Valleys, among others, now were vast swamps and seas were forming in many places, such as Wisconsin, where once before in the time of the dinosaurs, there had been true sea.

On the fringes of the marshes the marinas began to appear. At

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first they were well-built settlements with substantial houses and open waterways for streets, then under the pressure of numbers they began to deteriorate. They became shack towns perched on stilts with narrow alleys of planks. As they grew in extent the water became stagnant and a stench hung over them—the smell of chemicals and the decomposition of vegetable matter. Typhus reappeared, along with ancient fevers that no one had heard of for years. The water extruded a scum and beneath it the familiar fishes and plants died off and others flourished fantastically.

Looking at the pictures, Dr. Byrom was reminded of the disaster at Cobequid.

The Cobequid had been one of the last of the National Open Spaces to disappear. The Department of Biology had fought hard to keep it out of the public domain on the ground that it was unfit for human habitation but it was overruled by the Congressional Committees. The vast marsh, once a natural preserve teeming with wild life, had been taken over as an amphibious settlement. At first, the movement of the tidal waters kept conditions viable, but as hut was added to ricketty hut, the area became a vast slum. Then came disaster with a mysterious element added.

Six months ago, a high spring tide rose against the houses, collapsing them and sweeping away the inmates. The loss of life had been great, but few bodies were found. The Department of Public Order had segregated the area and refused to allow reporters and photographers in.

Dr. Byrom, in his official capacity, had visited the scene with a young scientist from the Department of Biology as his guide. They went along the crooked plank walks through a scene of desolation. Wrecked houses, half-submerged; a deposit of gray mud over everything, the water littered with flotsam and patches of floating material.

"What is that stuff?"

"Shredded clothing."

"What shredded it?"

The young scientist shrugged his shoulders.

"Curious. One would expect to find floating bodies. What do you people think about it?"

The young scientist said bitterly, "We are not allowed to think in our Department now."

"I know how you feel, Altimas," said Dr. Byrom, "but listen. Public life and public office are today simply efforts in the realm of the possible. We go from expedient to expedient—and we always lose the fight. As one private person to another, what do you think?"

Altimas relaxed. "We don't know. Public Order says a tidal wave washed the bodies out to sea. Perhaps. Since we are not allowed

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to think, we can only point out a coincidence—the spring tide coincided with a natural phenomenon that has been going on here for eons—the annual migration of the eels. The females come down the river here and meet the males waiting for them in the tidal shallows. Have you ever seen the mating of the eels?"

"No."

"Fantastic! Millions of serpentine bodies locked in a writhing, twisting, turning mass, churning up the sea like a great turbine. Their sexual ardor is orgiastic—incredible!—there is nothing like it on earth. Once I happened to be near them, on the fringe of the migration—I was knocked off my feet and my diving suit was covered with their slime."

They looked down at the dark water. Little catspaws flecked it, a sign of movement below the surface—a flat evil head followed by a body as thick as a hawser emerged and vanished in pursuit of something.

"Doctor, you can see what is happening here," said Altimas. He waved his hand at the marsh stretching away on all sides. "We have created an environment here that is unfavorable to man and favorable to other species. Take the order of *Anguilla,* for instance—eels—that chap we just saw. We used to have about twenty different kinds of eels, now we have forty—some of them of immense size. They appear to be increasing in size and numbers—this is their world, not ours. What about the human species, Doctor?"

"Well, you know. A species doesn't suddenly come to a stop. It dwindles. Or it mutates."

"Any hope in mutation? You people did a lot of work on it, didn't you? Any results?"

"About all we can say with certainty is that it is a definite feature of the evolutionary process. Some biologists think that it is accidental in the sense of being without preparation; others think it is an implicit response to environment changing or about to change. There is certain evidence to suggest that species may have periods of vigor and periods of instability; in the latter they are apt to mutate downwards."

"Not hopeful, is it?"

"No. We are coming to the brink. Nobody knows what is ahead."

That afternoon he went by shuttle to Montauk where the tiers of delivery rooms were being prepared for multitudinous birth. He found Dr. Yeager concerned about the expectant mother whose condition he had reported. They went to the wards to examine her.

"Her body temperature has fallen ten degrees—unheard of!"

The woman's color had become greenish. She was moaning, unable to answer questions. Her abdomen was cold to the touch.

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"Looks to me like prenatal shock," said Dr. Byrom. "What's her history?"

"You know we have no time for case histories nowadays but I happen to know that the woman was brought in from a distressed area, one of those wretched marinas off the coast."

He watched the dial recording the foetal heartbeat; he used his stethoscope.

"Slow, much too slow! There's something very much wrong here. I'm going to send her to the delivery room at once."

In the delivery room the patient fell into a convulsion.

"I think you're going to lose her," said Byrom.

Dr. Yeager came quickly to a decision. In spite of the human condition, the official medical attitude had not changed—a baby must be brought into the world. The surgical team was summoned; Dr. Yeager prepared to cut open the abdominal wall.

In a matter of minutes he held up the baby by the feet. It was a strange color, whitish and unwrinkled, so smooth it almost slipped from Yeager's grasp. It was alive, its mouth made gulping movements.

"Your millionth child seems to be suffocating," said Dr. Byrom.

Yeager applied the Crossman breather but the creature could not absorb the oxygen. Byrom noticed that three parallel slits, the vestigial gills of the human embryo, had appeared on each side of the neck.

"Give it to me." he said.

His intelligence had warned him that the slippery skin would be cold, but its touch was a shock. He looked at the mutant—at the round body, the arms so shockingly small, the little feet like stumps, the chinless mouth—and put it in the basin of warm water. It submerged with a swift darting motion.

"Are you mad!" cried Yeager trying to catch it.

Byrom knocked his hand away. "Look."

A line on each side of the neck became vivid, rose-colored—the gill slit trembled on the verge of opening. The creature revived and looked at them with not-quite-human eyes—then the rosy color paled, the light faded from eyes and skin. It died before their eyes because the gill mechanism had not sufficiently developed.

"The poor woman," Yeager muttered. "She's given birth to a freak, a monster."

Byrom turned and stared at him, bleakly. The bitter taste of despair was in his mouth. "No more than that she-ape of whom you spoke gave birth to a freak or a monster when she was delivered of a man," he said. Yeager gaped at him. "We've already taken the next step," Byrom went on, his voice rising, harshly. "Only it's

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not up to the stars that we're being led—it's down—it's down—" His voice cracked. He waved his hand at the window, gesturing.

The others, fallen silent, followed his gesture. Just below them, Montauk Point came to its end. Past the last rock, where Byrom's furious and hopeless hand pointed wildly, lay the open and wide-ranging, cradle-rocking sea.

THE SKY OF SPACE

No more a crystal sphere with nailed-up stars,
Nor floor of Heaven, but a stranger thing
And fitting words have not been made to bring
Praise to old wonders' new-born avatars.
This is no site of grand Miltonian wars,
No trophy hall of myth where beast and king
Act out the lays that Homer's kinsmen sing
In Attika or Danmark, Hind of Fars.
Yet even when with new-coined phrase we trace
Those shapes of splendor that equations fill—
Or when some Rhysling sees what now we miss—
Even then will the balladry of space
Resound with Old Olympian echoes still
And ghost-gods walk in each Ephemeris.

—KAREN ANDERSON

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Introduction to THE QUESTION by LARRY M. HARRIS and DONALD E. WESTLAKE and THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IMPORTANT by CALVIN W. DEMMON

Not infrequently it used to happen that we would get an idea for a story, only to find that another writer had not only gotten the same idea, but had written it down (and sold it) before we did; other writers report the same phenomena. Now we are an editor and we find it often happens that a MS will arrive on our desk only a day or so after we have bought one on the same theme. Coincidence? Telepathy? The Collective Unconscious? Who knows? At any rate, only a week after we got the Harris-Westlake story, along came the Demmon story. Intrigued by the way the different writers, who are unknown to each other, handed the subject which occurred to them independently, we decided to print both stories together. We think that two differently-angled views may, like those of the stereoscope, produce a three-dimensional image.

Larry M. Harris has a brown beard and plays the piano. Donald E. Westlake has a red beard and lives in Canarsie. After reading their conjoint story of what happened once to Rossi, who was convinced that the universe was aimed, like a pistol, straight at his head, we have been wondering: is either beard real? And, for that matter, is either Harris or Westlake?

THE QUESTION

by Larry M. Harris and Donald E. Westlake

THE ROOM WAS VERY QUIET, which disturbed Rossi. But, then, anything would have disturbed Rossi: he was trying to correct

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term papers for an English I course, and he had reached the state where the entire room had begun to grate on his nerves. Soon, he knew, he would have to get up and go out for a walk. It was the middle of the afternoon, and if he went for a walk he would meet every housewife in the development. That, too, would be irritating: but all life, he had begun to realize, was a choice between irritations. He sighed, picked up the next sheet and focussed his eyes.

The coma is used to mark off pieces of a sentence which . . .

The telephone rang.

. . . pieces of a sentence which aren't independent so that . . .

It rang again.

"God damn," Rossi said, to nobody in particular, and went across the room to answer it, breathing heavily. As he reached the receiver he had won the battle for control, and his "Hello," was almost polite.

"Hello, there," a voice on the other end said, a bright and cheery voice. "What kind of weather is it outside?"

There was a brief silence.

Rossi said: "What?"

"I asked you," the voice said, just as cheerfully, "what kind of weather it was outside."

Control snapped. "Who the hell are you?" Rossi said. "The Weather Bureau? Of all the damn fool—"

"Mr. Rossi," the voice cut in, quite without rancor, "I'm quite serious. Please believe me."

"Now, look—"

"Please, Mr. Rossi," the voice said. "Relax."

Even as you and I, Rossi was sometimes prey to the impression that the universe was aimed, like a pistol, straight at his head. The afternoon had done nothing to remove this impression, and this telephone call, with its idiotic question, was the final straw. The world narrowed, contracted, and centered around Rossi's head. Everything, *everything,* was part of a conspiracy directed at Rossi, and everybody was out to do him harm.

"Relax?" he asked the receiver. "Now, look, whoever you are. I'm working here. I'm trying to get some work done. I don't need anybody calling up to ask stupid—"

"It is not a stupid question," the voice told him patiently. "Please believe that I—that we really must know your answer to it."

Somehow, even through the red fog of anger, Rossi believed the voice. "What is this, then?" he asked thinly. "Some kind of TV program?"

"Why—no," the voice said. "And it isn't a research poll, a psychiatric game or a practical joke. We are quite serious, Mr. Rossi."

"Well," Rossi said, having

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come to a decision, "the hell with you." He began to hang up. But the voice continued to talk, and curiosity won out, briefly, in its battle with anger. The whole world was, admittedly, after Rossi: but he had his choice of irritants. It was the phone call *versus* his English I class.

He put the receiver back to his ear.

"—must insist," the voice was saying. "It will really be much simpler, Mr. Rossi, if you just answer the question. We can call again, you know, and continue to call. We don't in the least want to bother or disturb you, but—"

"It would be a lot simpler," Rossi told the voice, "if you'd let me know why you want an answer to a question like that. What kind of weather is it outside—my God, can't you look for yourself? Or call Information, or something?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you any more," the voice said, with a trace of what might have been real regret, and might have been only the actor's version of it so common among television quiz show announcers. "But if you'll just—"

"Some kind of a nut," Rossi muttered.

"What was that?" the voice asked.

Rossi shook his head at the phone. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing." And then, possibly under the spur of embarrassment, he bent down from his position at the telephone and took a look toward the front window of the room. "It's a nice day," he said. "Or anyhow it looks like a nice day. Is that what you want?"

"Exactly," the voice said, and Rossi thought he could hear relief in its tones. "Can you go into a little more detail?"

"Well," Rossi went on, feeling even more embarrassed—the way things had gone all day, now was the moment when someone would walk in on him and find him describing the weather to a strange voice on the telephone—"well, it's a little cloudy. But nice. I can't see the sun because of the clouds, but there's plenty of light and it looks warm. Kind of misty, I suppose you'd say."

"Ah," the voice responded. "You can't see the sun, you say?"

"That's right," Rossi told him. "But it's a good day, if you know what I mean. A little cloudy, but—say, look, what the hell is this, anyhow?" The thought of someone surprising him during so odd a conversation gave rise to one last sudden spurt of irritation. "Calling up strangers to ask stupid questions like—"

"Thank you, Mr. Rossi," the voice said smoothly. "Thank you very much."

And then—*and then*—it said something else. Obviously not meant for Rossi's ears, it reached them nevertheless through pure ac-

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cident, just before the stranger on the other end of the line rang off. Just a few words, but in those few words Rossi realized that he had been right, right all along. Everything centered around Rossi. Maybe he would never know why, or how. But the world, the entire world, was—truly and completely—aimed right at the Rossi head.

Just a few words, heard distantly, the few words a man might say as he was hanging up a telephone receiver, to someone else in the room . . .

"It's okay, Joe," the voice said casually. "He can't see it. You can take it away."

Calvin W. Demmon says that, "I was born in Los Angeles shortly after World War I. I graduated with a BA in English from the University of California, and taught high-school English for a couple of years. Right now I'm a stationery salesman. I've read F&SF since the first issue, with occasional lapses, and I have to fight over possession of each new one with my wife Carol, who has sold a few True-Confessions-type stories but prefers (I think) to stay home and take care of our two children." Personally, we don't believe a word of it, but, be that as it may, his story contains a lesson for all of us. This means you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IMPORTANT

by Calvin W. Demmon

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS a little boy who lived all by himself in the Big City. He lived in an apartment which looked down upon a Very Busy Street, and he had a television and a record play-

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er and there were blue curtains on his windows.

His name was Stanley Scheer, and he was about eight or nine.

Stanley Scheer believed himself to be the most important person in the world. He believed that everybody else in the whole world had been put there to help Stanley Scheer. And, worst of all, he thought they all *knew* about it. For Stanley Scheer thought that everything that happened to him was of great importance to everybody else, and that a whole lot of what happened to him had been planned by everyone else. He thought that all the world was a stage, and he was doing an important monologue under the direction of Them.

For example, Stanley Scheer firmly believed that if he really needed to do something, They would make provision for it. He believed that if he needed an elevator in a Hurry to take him down to the garage below They would make sure that one was waiting on his floor. He believed that if he wanted broccoli for lunch in the cafeteria downtown and there was only enough broccoli for one person left They would save it for him. And he believed that if he needed a parking place someone unimportant would get a Message or something from Them and pull out right in front of Stanley Scheer.

The fact that he didn't always get his elevator or his parking space or his broccoli seemed to *prove* to Stanley Scheer that They had some sort of Mysterious Plan for him. Because he was the most important man in the world They had to watch out for him, and make sure that he carried out his ultimate purpose. This Stanley Scheer was sure of, and this he believed. They had some sort of Ultimate Purpose in mind for him, and it was up to Them to make sure that nothing happened to him until he fulfilled it, because he was the Most Important Man In The World.

It got so that Stanley Scheer was devising little Tricks for them. He would get his bank book down from the shelf and take his car downtown and walk toward the bank and then, instead of entering the bank, he would dart into the cafe next door to see if he could surprise Them before they had everybody bustling around again. He would suddenly turn right on his way to work instead of turning left, hoping to catch Them with their automobiles stopped and their streetlights turned off. He would jump up in the middle of a television program and spin to another channel to try to see what They were watching in the evening. He never caught them at anything, but that didn't shake his faith in Them. "You can't see Radio Waves, either," he would say to himself.

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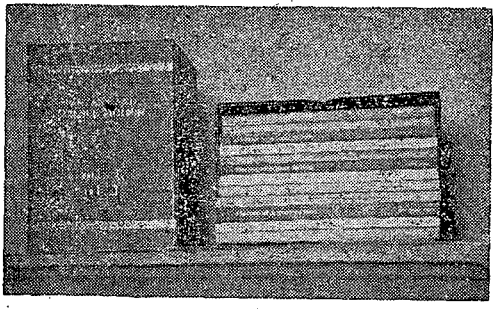
One day Stanley Scheer got his bankbook down from the shelf, took the waiting elevator down to the garage, and drove to the bank. As he pulled into the crowded parking lot a car pulled out of a parking place directly in front of him, leaving him a vacant space. It was the only vacant space on the lot. Stanley Scheer smiled, drove into the space, stopped his car, and got out. He walked into the bank, deposited his paycheck, walked back to the parking lot, entered his car, and started it up. Then he dropped it into reverse and spun out of the parking space, barely missing a car which was waiting behind him. He mashed the accelerator to the floor and roared out of the parking lot, careening wildly around corners and rocketing down the street with smoke pouring from his exhaust pipe.

In the bank parking lot, the car which had been waiting behind Stanley Scheer pulled into the space. The Most Important Man In The World got out, shook his head, smiled sadly, and walked towards the bank.

Stanley Scheer, who was killed in a head-on collison on his way home, had fulfilled his Ultimate Purpose.



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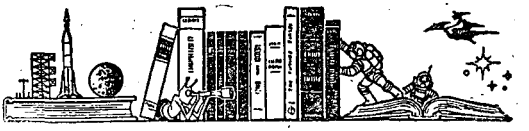

SPECTRUM, **Kingsley Amis** and **Robert Conquest**, ed., Harcourt, Brace, $4.50

This is a collection of rather good stories, all or at any rate many of which will be familiar to those who have kept up with their reading in this field. Kingsley Amis (in case any of our readers learned to read last week) is the author of LUCKY JIM, the original Angry Young Man novel. It has never been entirely clear to me exactly what he was angry about; as near as I can see it is because he lacks the right Class accent and hence cannot join the British Foreign Service—probably his good luck, probably ours, too. He is also the author of a survey of Science Fiction, of sorts, NEW MAPS OF HELL, mention of which can cause veins to swell and voices to rise wherever two or three SF writers are gathered together. Robert Conquest is apparently a British poet, whose works, I am ashamed to say, are otherwise unknown to me. The two of them have been readers of Science Fiction since the Thirties. They note in their preface that they have purposely restricted themselves to "material which has not had wide circulation in Britain." This does not mean (although it might have) that they present the neglected treasures of French, Flemish, Norwegian or Azerbaijanian SF; no, duck, this is all straight Yank mag stuff—and if it is not clear to me why the fact of the contents not having had wide circulation in Britain makes them particularly suitable for further circulation in the U.S. of A., well, what the Hell. Most of them are worth reading again. The only ones which I hadn't read were William Tenn's *Null-P* and Robert A. Heinlein's *By His Bootstraps*, though I had heard of both quite often. The Tenn item tells of a post-H-war America where all public gifts, from the presidential office to scholarships, are given not because the recipients are outstanding but because they are—statistically—average. This overthrow of "the conception that the best should govern" is full of fascinating possibilities, and even though Mr. Tenn's incorrigibly antic mind obliges him to play it for laughs (tittimehahas, not yocketi-

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bopchas), it still provides food for thought. The Heinlein story is twenty-two years old, and while the particular time-paradox premise (in effect the same one with which Mr. Heinlein played, for our amusing and perplexing, in *Calling All You Zombies* [*F&SF*, March, 1959]) is naturally not as impressive today—so many stories having meanwhile borrowed from it—it is still a clever and readable item. Others in the book include Frederik Pohl's famous twist on The Affluent Society, *The Midas Plague,* which now seems (after a third reading) rather too long; Algys Budrys's *The Executioner,* a socio-theological tale of a judge who loses a faith—and then regains it—with a difference; Robert Sheckley's already classical *Pilgrimage To Earth,* an amusing satire on a certain type of sex-and-travel story (". . . nearbye the booming surf deafened, inflamed and maddened them."); Katherine MacLean's *Unhuman Sacrifice;* and others by Simak, Barr, Berryman and Elliott. We can find no quarrel with the editors' statement, "There are kinds of ingenuity, kinds of invention, kinds of questions, ways of putting such questions, notions of possibility, effects of irony and wit, of wonder and terror that only science fiction can offer."

THE SATAN BUG, **Ian Stuart,** Scribners, $3.95

The subtitle of THE SATAN BUG is, "A tale of a diabolical conspiracy," and I guess that's true. Some evidence of the book's style can be obtained from the following paragraph:

" 'Please take this at once, to this address in Warsaw.' He pushed a slip of paper across the table. 'You will be paid a hundred pounds, all expenses, and a hundred pounds on your return. A delicate mission, I realize, perhaps even a dangerous one, although in your case I should not think so. We have investigated you very carefully, Mr. Cavell. You are reputed to know the byways of Europe as a taxi-driver knows the streets of London: I do not foresee that frontiers will present you with much difficulty.' "

Wow!

In short, this is a thriller of the classical variety, with a science fiction background involving bacteriological warfare. Those who like James Bond (the creature of another Ian) should certainly like this one. Personally, I prefer the works of Jane Austen.

THE EXPERT DREAMERS, **Frederik Pohl,** ed., Doubleday, $3.95

In collecting stories of Science Fiction by sixteen scientists Mr. Frederick Pohl, in THE EXPERT DREAMERS, has demonstrated a very clever idea. That he has demonstrated it entirely successfully

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is, perhaps, not proven. It may, however, be said of the book that, like the curate's egg, "parts of it are very nice." The word "stories", to begin with, is used with some license. "On the Feasibility of Coal-Driven Power Stations", by O. R. Frisch, for example, is really an essay—I guess—in which the co-discoverer of the uranium fission effect speculates satirically on the dangers of anthracite and bituminous in the same manner that others warn against the dangers of atomic fuels. The fact is that coal smoke (and, for that matter, oil-smoke), *is* dangerous. I am for outlawing the whole business. Back to cord-wood;—plant trees on all the land producing expensive food-surpluses. But—a *story?* Come on, Fred. Then there is something called "The Singers" —three pages from a novel by W. Grey Walter, not even an essay; and a chunk from radio-astronomer Fred Hoyle's novel, THE BLACK CLOUD, which I can sum up only in the words of one of the characters, viz: "This is unbearably scientific."

As for the stories proper—"At The End of the Orbit," by the remarkable Arthur C. Clarke, it seems to me deals with something which is already scientifically possible, and hence is not Science Fiction as we know it (to coin a phrase). But it is interesting as a morality tale. Isaac Asimov's "Lenny" is one of his robotics stories and hence, by definition, a minor classic. (I decided I've been using "classic" too often so Ike gets downgraded to Classic, junior grade.) Dr. Chandler Davis's "Adrift On The Policy Level", is an attack on the Giant Corporation, current concepts of success, and scientific dependence on big business—a mordant, clever thing; unquestionably the best in the book. Norbert Weiner (as W. Norbert) contributes a curiosity; Willy Ley (as Robert Willey—I must say I've seen more ingenious pseudonyms than these two) has unwisely consented to the resurrection of a story from 1940; Dr. Leo Szilard's "The Mark Gable Foundation" is just barely a story —but its sardonic wit more than makes up for this. There are more, but I won't bother. This collection is not one of Mr. Pohl's best efforts, or even one of his better ones.

—Avram Davidson

UNWISE CHILD, Randall Garrett, Doubleday, $3.50

UNWISE CHILD, Randall Garrett's latest, has something of difference to offer to those who may be expecting the usual Garrett excitement. It concerns itself with the need of those in authority to remove from the Earth a robotic super-intelligence whose built-in desire to learn and experiment with its learnings has brought it to the brink of being a threat to

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the world that created it. UNWISE CHILD deals mainly with the voyage carrying this intelligence to a safely distant world and what results during this voyage when human elements begin to interact with the robotic one.

To describe the book in terms of its action only, though, is to do it an injustice. Randall Garrett is a great story-teller, and it is the fate of story-tellers that their very excellence in that department alone fills our eyes and minds until we see nothing but what is taking place beyond the window of words on the page before us. The windows of the pages in Randall Garrett's writing are constructed in so clean a style as to be practically transparent. We all but fall through them physically into the action.

So there is the tendency to take a great deal for granted in a story by this author. We assume as a regular part of the *table d'hôte* that the plot will be sound, economical, and effective, that the logical and science elements in the science fiction will be true, full-weight, new-minted coin of the realm—something we do not always do with other authors. And like the professional magician, sometimes this author makes it seem a little too easy—and we run the danger of foregetting everything but the magic carpet ride.

In UNWISE CHILD, however, there is something more, which is not to be missed. In the robotic intelligence named Snookums, Randall Garrett has come up with a point of view, a character, with the appeal of an identity that possesses at once great powers and great vulnerability. And when this identity becomes trapped by the logic of its own nature between the iron walls of the Asimov Robotic Laws, and Christian theology—then character and theme come together in a way that gives this book a value beyond the entertainment of its action. It should be read.

—Gordon R. Dickson

NECROMANCER, **Gordon R. Dickson,** Doubleday, $2.95

One of subspecies of the science fiction novel is what I call the "Van Vogtian novel"—since A. E. van Vogt was the originator of the subspecies. Damon Knight has referred to the method used in writing such a novel as the "kitchen sink technique" because it is apparently written by throwing in every idea that comes into the author's head while he writes it—including, one supposes, the kitchen sink. Van Vogt has admitted in print* that that is precisely the method he always used; he never saved an idea back because he thought that doing so would tend to dam up the flow;

*Of WORLDS BEYOND, *Fantasy Press, 1948*

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instead, he put the idea into what he was working on and went on with the story.

Such a book, obviously, cannot be static. I mean, like, man, you *got* to have action! You see the general rule is: Use an idea *once* —and then *throw it away!* Only a relatively small handful of the gadgets, situations, *et cetera,* can be used again. The author cannot work in depth. He does not explore an idea; he's too busy getting the next one in.

One of the peculiarities of such novels is that a leading character inevitably gets killed during the novel and pops up hale and hearty some chapters later. Van Vogt's Kathleen Layton in *Slan* and Gilbert Gosseyn in *The World of A,* for examples. Why? Well, it is inevitable that, during the process of writing such a book, the author will have an idea for knocking off the hero or heroine—so, in order to follow the rules, he has to use that idea. There's nothing wrong with that, because the author knows an idea for resurrection will come along pretty quickly.

Writing such a book is not as easy as it may sound. The more fecund a writer's imagination, the more difficult it becomes, because, in order to be a good book, all those things have to be tied together into a coherent whole. Van Vogt's weakness was that the end of the novel always left a good double-handful of plot threads hanging loose with nowhere to go. What *were* those mysterious whisperings in the roots of the Venusian trees?)

Gordon R. Dickson's NECROMANCER is the story of Paul Formain, a young man of mysterious background (so mysterious, in fact, that Paul is puzzled by it himself) in a world that is practically run by a giant robot computer linkage called the Complex. Working against this computer-based government is a mysterious group called the Chantry Guild, run by a man called Walter Blunt, whom Paul can never get a good look at. (If you become suspicious at this point, you are very likely right.) I will not recount—as the book jacket does—all the varied gimmicks that Paul runs into during the course of the novel. Suffice it to say that they are many, imaginative, and almost all thrown away. The action is fast and well-paced; the futuristic science is well thought out; the philosophy is deep and perceptive.

Mr. Dickson is a good writer and handles the "kitchen sink technique" better than most. I am not trying to damn the book with faint praise; instead, I have some very loud damns with which to praise it. Again, as with Van Vogt, I find myself at the end with a huge mass of unexplained material. Here's a plot-thread tagged "the Alternate Laws". Wot's it mean, Mr. D.? Who'd

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you say Blunt was, again? *Who* killed Malorn, and how? And *why*? And what was Kantele doing? And . . . And like that.

If you like the Van Vogtian novel, by all means read NECROMANCER—but don't expect to get any more out of it than you would out of Van Vogt.

—Randall Garrett

***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot:* LX**

In 1989, Ferdinand Feghoot's assistance was desperately called for by the most independent and powerful of all great corporations, the Universal Telephone and Telegraph Company.

"Mr. Feghoot," pleaded its distraught emissary, "nothing works right any more. Our communications satellites, our Earthside transmitters, even the sets in our copters and cars haven't worked since last Tuesday. As soon as you switch them on they give out one deep, bell-like note—and that's all! It's driving us crazy. I'm so worried that I can't remember whether my own number is 3502-472296-859-00067-33 or 2503-742926-589-06007-88 or—" He began sobbing pitifully.

"Have you no clue to the cause?" Feghoot asked.

"W-we know what it is. It's a ray from the s-s-system of Altair. It was turned on on Tuesday, and we've had n-n-nothing but those awful bell-like notes ever since! It's an Altarian plot, Mr. Feghoot! Please, *please* help us."

"Now, now, Mr. Coupling," soothed Ferdinand Feghoot. "It's no plot, really it isn't. This just happens to be one of those rays when everything goes *Dong!*"

—GRENDEL BRIARTON (*with thanks to Vee Heintzelman*)

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This story, about Tyson St. J. Tyson III, is sensitive and moving—words whose meaning depends not only on their definitions but on who writes them, who reads them, and what they are about. Mr. Will Mohler, who knows his adventurous bachelor hero quite well, describes himself as a "hermit without a cave. Confirmation of the existence of the author," he continues, "is still pending. This story is one of a series of experiments . . . whose objective it is to isolate the virus of obsession [with] stone walls which extend forever in every direction, and with frozen seas, with a view to melting them. "The author warns that he has met the protagonist of this story on many docks, in railroad stations and at airfields, but just as often *on ships at sea, on overseas flights, exploring the precincts of Buddhist temples, climbing mountains with snow on them—even making love to girls with eyes like black wings." He adds that he, the author, lives in Washington, D. C., and is a gargoyle.*

THE JOURNEY OF TEN THOUSAND MILES

by Will Mohler

TYSON ST. J. TYSON III SLEPT on an ornate old sofa in the front hall of the house because all of the rooms had been given a cleaning which was somehow supposed to suffice for a longer time than ordinary cleanings. The rugs had been swept and beaten then rolled up and wrapped in heavy brown paper. The furniture had been swaddled in old sheets and mattress covers held in place with spirals of twine. Smaller articles had been carefully sorted, catalogued and put away more or less ritually in a variety of crates and trunks.

The smaller things, because they were so numerous and yet so special, had been most demanding

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of time, of thought and of emotional resources. A meaning or even a chain of meanings attached to each article. In some cases an article would have no obvious intrinsic value but had been cherished by someone now Gone Across, or might have been cherished by the Departed, and so had to be created with optimum reverence. Aunt Lucy's miniature cedar chest of handkerchiefs which were never, never to be washed was a case in point, as was the five-inch-diameter glass orb which Mother had kept in her pillow every night of her life and without which she had been unable to sleep. There were objects which might have been prosthetic devices of some kind, and while the owner or owners of these were unknown and may even have Passed before Tyson was born, it was impossible to doubt that they had been deeply meaningful to someone, perhaps even vital. Mother had often held up bits of cloth and odd objects, saying: "This belonged to poor dear Aunt Pru Whitlow who Passed when you were a wee thing," or "Your Great grandfather carried this against his heart at Shiloh." Tyson had been made to handle these things and examine them without quite knowing what he was supposed to see, and Mother had held them to her breast for a long time before putting them away where they belonged. She had often wept at such times, especially during her later years.

There were things still more enigmatic, and so more demanding in their way, and there were things which were not enigmatic at all. There were drapes, table scarves, runners, doilies, candlesticks, sconces, lamps, vases, cloisonne boxes, trays, incense burners, fire tongs and pokers, squash racquets, shellacked canoe paddles, antlers, mounted birds, balsam pillows, clocks, paperweights, china figurines and hair receivers, souvenir knickknacks from three World Expositions, pokerwork plaques, albums of photographs and of postcards, steel engravings, lithographs and photographs in a variety of frames and the decorations that went behind the frames—the pheasant feathers, the lacquered palm fronds, the gilded reed maces which Father had called 'cattails', to Mother's distress—many acutely personal things best described as bedroom and sickroom requisites, and articles of women's clothing which would never, never be worn again, ivory-colored, very fragile and disturbing to touch, in tissue paper with moth flakes.

It had been necessary to classify everything according to fragility and sentimental value before wrapping and packing. The fact that these things were being put away and not taken along had to be justified somehow in each case;

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each item had had to be reassured of the regard in which it was held, touched in a certain way before being packed away, as had each piece of furniture before being swaddled against the hungry air.

Gummer, a toothless and otherwise nameless young man from the shanty settlement, limited of wit but strong in reliability and loyalty, had been engaged to wash the windows and wax the floors. The shutters had then been secured and the furniture moved as far as possible from view so that the pieces, strange in their mummy-wrappings, could not beckon or rebuke Tyson from the shadows as he passed the rooms on his way to the bathroom or the kitchen. The doors had been left open because closing them would have made an oppresive tunnel of the hallway. Besides, Tyson could not have endured the finality of closing the doors—not before it was actually time to go. Passing these dark mouths, though, was like jumping over deep pits; they exerted a gravitational pull that was almost physical, and he had to flee past them with his eyes fixed straight ahead. He had already said goodbye to the rooms.

Tyson had taken every possible precaution against oversleeping on steamer day, but it was the sun shining in through the fanlight over the front door that woke him by tickling his sinuses and detonating a fine head-clearing sneeze. He had slept with his head supported by the arm of the sofa at such an angle that the sun caught him full in the face at exactly twenty-seven minutes before seven. His eyes opened instantly and without blinking or protest—sun on shallow water, pale blue and also uncommonly round.

It would have been difficult to find fault with Tyson's face. It was rectangular and more perfectly symmetrical than most faces one sees nowadays. In spite of generosity of flesh and a striking smoothness, the bone structure was apparent. It was generally held that the Tysons had good bones. Matrons of the town, when compelled at last to say something Christian, described Tyson's face as 'basically sound'. A good face really. Basically sound. And such a ready smile! The eyes, though, were very round. Not with the best will in the world could that fact be evaded.

Tyson supported himself on one elbow and studied the alarm clock, waiting for it to sound. It was a tense business, much like watching a balloon expand to the breaking point. It had been set for a quarter to seven. Fond as he was of the little clock, he had been forced to admit that it was not a precision instrument. There was a fifteen-minute factor of error, and Tyson had erred on the side of earliness. It was a travel alarm, a flat clock which formed a hollow

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prism when unfolded for use. He might have locked the alarm mechanism, folded the clock and packed it between layers of linen in his valise, but the prolonged tension might weaken the spring and he could never be absolutely sure that the catch would not jar loose and allow the alarm to go off at the worst possible time. He was not sure what the worst possible time would be, but he supposed that it would be when he was surrounded by people and could not open the valise with its burden of painfully personal things. It could happen while he was on the pier or on the deck of the steamer, or even in his cabin when he was *with* someone. This last image was at once the least clear and the most disquieting to contemplate. The alarm had to be allowed to ring and to run down. Even as a numbness punctuated with dull aches crept from the point of his elbow upward to his shoulder, thence downward over his ribcage to the point of his hip, he remained motionless. The alarm was not to go off while he was looking elsewhere, nor even while he was thinking of something else. If he should be taken by surprise, the clock would win and he would lose. It had become a game with definite rules and even a tradition of sorts, like golf, though he had no recollection of having decided upon such a contest, let alone making up rules.

It was easier to focus the eyes upon the words *Walmco Travel Alarm* on the face of the clock than upon the hub from which the hands radiated for the same mysterious reason that it was easier to gaze at the subtle cleft at the tip of a person's nose than to look directly into his pupils. Focussing the mind was a more challenging undertaking.

Walmco: A dead end, contrived, sterile, not even euphonious. The word could hardly be uttered without some loss of dignity.

Alarm: A terrible word, taken by itself. Sirens and voices like sirens. Vision of wild-eyed people rushing into wintry streets in their underwear. And worse, much worse, a vision and a memory:

Dr. Mathers could not conceal his alarm . . .

"I do not wish to alarm you, but Mrs. Tyson . . ."

The Alarm in her eyes, and the pain . . .

Nights—and seasons—of alarm . . .

There was almost no combination of words which the word *'alarm'* did not convert into a memory or a promise of terror. Why did the manufacturer allow such a symbol to be stencilled on his product?

Travel: One could think about travel, and one always had, or so it seemed. It was not one thing but an endless series of things. If,

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while waiting for the alarm to shatter the sunny silence of the place, he tried to concentrate on the clock, its essence, if it had an essence, behaved like a drop of quicksilver. When he pondered the significance of the clock in the scheme of his existence, it was to discover its essential innocence of significance. He could not recall the advent of any new preoccupation with time—no time-clock to punch, no cows or goats to milk. It made sense only with reference to the idea of travel, or of departure. Time did not reveal itself as harshly to Tyson as it does to most men, nor as clearly. When he thought of his life in chronological terms at all it was only as a reflection of a long odyssean vision, but there was a break in it.

Like the grand ideas of Manhood and Freedom it had begun with what he now acknowledged as puerile yearning. At no time could he remember saying "Today I have begun to think of travel." Like the other grand ideas, it had been there all the time, but seemed to have been unaccountably overlooked before each incandescent moment when it had emerged upon consciousness. Perhaps it was something written in the secret code of genes and chromosomes, or it emerged with the first stirrings of those sinister cloistered glands about which poor dear Mother had spoken with such piteous quivering of voice and of lips. There had been two distinct periods—the period of Spanish Galleons, tamed dragons and navigable clouds, then the period of hissing locomotives and great white steamers. The images of the earlier period, though more poetic, were swaddled in batting like the objects in the trunks, but the later and more prosaic images had the power to produce that hot squirming behind the navel, or a sensation of being stretched like a rubber band between poles of ineffable guilt and pleasure. What came between these two epochs? It was within and about this hiatus between dreamy *Then* and heart-quickening *Now* that time became most muddled for Tyson, not because it was a forgotten period but because, in spite of his best efforts, it was too well remembered. There had been the swift, silent, solemn comings and goings of Dr. Mathers, and two practical nurses, Miss Crench and Miss Moomaugh, whose faces had looked like tools for rending and tearing things. There had been frightening smells and sounds and the sudden turning on of lights at unlikely hours. From upstairs, the sound of a little bell.

Good Lord, the bell!

Tyson propelled himself from the sofa, in spite of the near-paralysis of the upper half of his body, and staggered toward the front door. As one of several precautions he had taken against over-

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sleeping on that morning he had placed a small copper dinner bell within the mail-slot so that when the flap was pushed open the bell would be dislodged and fall to the floor with a fine clatter. On the front door he had tacked a note to Mr. Clough the mailman:

DEAR MR. CLOUGH,
KINDLY KNOCK WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR MAIL DELIVERY. I SHOULD CONSIDER THIS A GREAT PERSONAL FAVOR. AS YOU MAY KNOW, I AM TO EMBARK UPON AN EXTENDED JOURNEY THIS VERY DAY. I THANK YOU.
T. TYSON

Tyson ordinarily received very little mail, so to insure that Mr. Clough would come on steamer day he had addressed a series of postcards to himself and mailed them, using a mailbox on the other side of town. He did not know how long it took for a postcard to reach oneself through the mail, so he had begun mailing the self-addressed cards ten or eleven days in advance. The cards themselves had come from an album which had belonged to his late aunt, but they were loose cards which had not yet been mounted and were duplicates with no writing on them. This had relieved him of the awkwardness of buying such postcards at Doc Strathmer's Pharmacy. The cards depicted such local scenes as the Town Square, the Town Hall (as it had been before 1900), the firehouse (as it had been before 1884), the bridge across Big Nimminy Creek below Squatters Crotch, the newer bridge across the Little Nimminy above Squatters Crotch and The Crotch itself. Four of the cards showed the more or less precipitous northwest face of Utter Hill which, for reasons nowhere recorded, was called Big Indian Drop. He had taken care to mail these last at least two days apart so that the duplication would not be too obvious.

On each of the postcards Tyson had written a message in the fine copperplate hand of which he was so justly proud. These messages wished him Godspeed and good health and urged him to temper his well known adventurous spirit with caution to assure that he would return one day to recount his exploits to the homebodies. All ended with protestations of the deepest affection and were signed simply 'P'. Writing the cards had given him a delicious feeling of conspiracy against the somnolence, the indifference and the blank opacity of the town and its people. It was sort of nice to receive the cards too, even knowing that he had sent them to himself. He was sure that other people would have sent such cards to him if they had taken time to

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think about it. People don't, though; they are hypnotized by the repetitive character of their daily routines, poor things, poor inert, dispirited *things*.

But how thoughtless he had been when he arranged to have the little bell fall to the floor when the mail-slot was pushed open. How could he have forgotten the meaning of the bell? He picked it up as he would have picked up a container of some supersensitive explosive and he seized the clapper between his thumb and forefinger. He peered through the narrow window beside the front door, but he saw only the foreshortened lawn, the back of the Supermarket and of the bowling-alley, where huge oak trees and lilac and forsythia bushes had once been, the empty boxes and crates and refuse-cans behind the buildings, but on the narrow, shadowed concrete walk between the buildings there was no one. When he allowed himself to imagine what it would have been like to hear the sudden jangle of the little bell again . . . there in the empty house with the mummified furniture, the coffins of memory that were the trunks and boxes, the shuttered rooms, his legs went numb, vibrated foolishly and threatened to buckle like rolls of wet paper.

He stood there in the hall for a long time, holding the bell by the clapper, pondering what should be done with it. To pack it among the other things would have meant entering one of the rooms and opening one of the trunks or boxes —obviously out of the question. He could not leave the bell on the hall table all by itself. It would be too easy to remember it sitting there—waiting, as it were, while the months and the years passed and no one came. It would have to be taken along in one of his valises. He would wrap the clapper in a handkerchief. Having settled upon this solution and thereby dispelled the anxieties brought on by the near thing with the bell and the mail-slot, he became aware that he was not suitably clad for the part of the house in which he stood. Like his father before him, he wore Dr. Bellaman's Health Underwear (For All Climes and All Weathers), and in this yellowish, all-embracing garment he had slept, though not without a giggly Devil-may-care sense of wickedness, for it was a proud tradition that the Tysons were not the sort of people who slept in their underwear, not under ordinary circumstances, certainly. But how special were the new circumstances, and how new the day!

He also wore the oilcloth money-belt which he had made himself. It had separate compartments for important papers, travelers' checques, large bills, smaller bills and change. These compartments were all filled to capacity and this

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made sleeping with the belt on a rather lumpy experience, but it had seemed a good idea to start getting used to it, and the minor discomfort was nothing compared to the feeling of adequacy, independence and readiness for anything which the belt afforded him, even as he slept in his underwear.

The money-belt and what it stood for represented a definite stage in the realization of Tyson's grand idea, or in the blossoming of Tyson himself, as did the travel alarm clock and what it stood for. The money-belt had come first, representing as it did his visit to Mr. Peters at the bank, his first positive gesture towards departure. To this estimable elder of the community he had confessed his dream—though only in a very general way. An horizon was a better object for contemplation than a road. It was wise to plan a departure, but the journey itself should be a flight *from* plan. Even as he talked to Mr. Peters about the care and disposition of property, the handling of the regular checks from the estate, foreign exchange, the services performed by American Express and ways of carrying money while traveling —he had told Mr. Peters of his money-belt—he reflected secretly that the protean promise beyond the fact of actual departure must never be permitted to crystallize into a mere itinerary. An itinerary could include seaports, cathedrals, historic monuments and endless hotels but had nothing to do with the singing islands, the pagodas in emerald lakes, the jungles and the rivers of mist and sun, the sea-cliff terraces with the clusters of beautiful people in bright clothing, always gay, relaxed and, above all, friendly. They would always be glad to see him—always brimming over with exciting plans which included him—Tyson. And the Girl. No imaginable itinerary could include that golden adventure. She would have very large eyes, which always looked up at *him* . . . But they had discussed practical matters only, and Mr. Peters had been very nice about it, very helpful. He had even congratulated Tyson for not having allowed his Romany impulses to obliterate altogether that basic prudence for which the Tysons had always been noted as long as he—Mr. Peters —could remember.

He could remember how Mr. Peters' expression had embodied the espirit of seriousness, even of quiet anxiety, which was the necessary atmosphere of the bank, and which was like the thin shell momentarily containing the hot, secret exhilaration that stirred in his vitals. He could remember every word that passed between Mr. Peters and himself. It could not have been very long ago. Nothing had happened to dispel the sense of ecstatic release he had felt when

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he left the bank; on the contrary, everything subsequent to that occasion seemed to have enhanced the feeling.

It was certainly *after* having been to the bank that he bought the alarm clock at Doc Strathmer's Pharmacy. Between the moods surrounding each occasion there was a clear line of demarcation, but the second mood, which had its locus in Doc's Pharmacy, even within the cloud of malty vapor surrounding Doc himself, would not have been possible without the first—the more restrained and solemn mood of the bank.

"I expect to do a bit of traveling, you know," he had said, and Doc had responded with a wonderfully phlegmy "Well, well, well!" If Mr. Peters had been the first person to whom he had confessed his intentions as fact, it was with Doc that he had first shared the meaning and the spirit of what lay beyond the fact of departure. In a way this was strange because Doc had always been darkly regarded by the Tyson household—the ladies of the Tyson household, now departed. There had been some unpleasantness about a young woman and an abortifacient, years before and in another town, and the mere fact that Doc had emerged from that scandal a free man and still a licensed pharmacist had never fully exonerated him in the eyes of some townspeople. This circumstance had made of him a furtive, surly and generally uncommunicative man. Also he drank. Was it Tyson's glad announcement that had changed him on that late spring night, or was it the night itself? A light westerly breeze had carried, besides the usual carbon monoxide of the town, the scent of lilac from the green streets and the scent of the green itself. The encroaching darkness had not been a mere dwindling of light but an iridescent invasion from the roots of trees in Druid forests and from the caves of old Atlantis. Tyson had concluded that there was something contagious in his own joy and consciousness of freedom. He had never realized what an affable old soul the druggist really was, and quite possibly no one else had realized it either. How more clearly we see them, Tyson had thought, making a mental note to develop this shard of thought later on, in solitude, and find out what it meant.

Doc had been eager to talk about travel, especially about Paris. He had been stationed there after the War. He winked and snickered when he spoke of Paris. "Let me give you a list of places," he had said. He had promised to prepare such a list, just for Tyson, and while Tyson was unclear about what was meant by "places" he was flattered and excited by the novelty of being party to a manly

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conspiracy. He was astonished at the ease with which he seconded Doc's winking, gutteral chuckling and warped smile.

A change in the wind had brought the moving organic scent of the harbor and the sea to mingle with the other fragrances of the night and those of the pharmacy. Their conversation turned to the relative merits of travel by air and by sea. Both favored the sea and ships. More remarkably, it was discovered that they both admired Masefield. Tyson had quoted:

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky . . .

While he had searched his memory for the next line, Doc had quoted:

Be red with rage and pale with lust,
Make beauty come, make peace, make trust,
Water and saltness mixed with dust;

Tyson had owned that he did not know that one.

Out of that magic night, incongruous, unaware of magic, came Doc's customers to interrupt their good talk with their requests for aspirin and nose-drops, for cold cream and Vaporub, for Ex-Lax, Noxema, Hair-off, Kleenex, bunion pads and corn-remover, five Phillies and a paper of Beechnut scrap, Fletcher's Castoria and Peterman's Ant Powders, cryptic prescriptions and Doctor Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, Nujol and Serutan, three rolls of toilet paper and a carton of Luckies, backwoods nostrum and physicians' specific. Most of them had seemed a little apologetic, as well they might, poor lumpy things of clay. Oddly enough they had enhanced his mood rather than vitiating it. Here they would stay, poor domesticated clods, immured in petty fears and dusty inertia, impoverished of color and of song; he, winged spirit, lover of the world, *viveur,* follower of whale-roads, would be their ambassador to Samarkand. Never had he felt such a tenderness for the people of the town—for the strangers and for those he had known for years.

The most poignant figure to waddle into the garish light of Doc's Pharmacy out of the enchanted night had been the former darling of football and ukelele players and princess unaware of Tyson's private fantasies, Viola Murge, now wife of a drunkard, mother of pallid, skinny nose-pickers, char, scullion, groaner over tubs, bloated slattern. Her nose still turned up pertly in the middle of the edematose face and her eyes were still pointlessly bright—two dew-drops on a cow-

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flop. Tube of Pazo and jar of Dr. Lemoine's Enema Compound ("Blessed Relief for the Costive"). "Why Viola Murge! How little you have changed," Tyson had felt compelled to say. Her smile had been the flick of a camera shutter and her answer something sibilant and incomprehensible. The back view as she left was even more pitiable: her skirt, owing to the burgeoning of her buttocks, was shorter in back than in front, and between the hiked-up skirt and the collapsed stockings the varicose veins behind her knees were too, too visible.

"Time . . ." Doc had mused, "The chariot of man, juggernaut of woman.

"True. Oh, *true!*" Tyson had concurred. Everything had been luminously true that night.

It could not have been long ago. Tyson sat on the edge of the sofa with a sheet wrapped about him like a Roman toga. He had been sitting still too long and felt a slight chill. The alarm clock had been obligingly silent while he had gone to the door to fetch the little bell and while he had stuffed it with a sock and packed it among his shirts. The clock, a mystery itself, was prolific of mysteries. Now it had been late in spring when he bought it, and through the following summer he had made other purchases at the Pharmacy, all more or less related to his departure. (And while it was true that Doc had never again been inclined to chat as he had that first night, seemed in fact to have lost that special mood, Tyson's mood had not changed at all. It had to be taken into account that Doc was a busy man and the responsibilities of a druggist were grave ones.) Still, he could remember having set the alarm for eight A.M. on a Christmas morning to be sure of being awake and fully dressed if anyone should call. No one had, but he could remember setting the clock in the reflected light of the snow outside. Yet it was still spring, or it was spring again. Time, as Doc Strathmer had said, was a chariot.

The sun spilled into a pool of light halfway between the end of the sofa and the front door, perversely enough, considering that the hands of the travel alarm still stood at twenty-seven minutes before seven. It was not ticking.

There was a thunderous knocking on the front door, but nothing came through the mail-slot. Trailing his toga-sheet, Tyson edged along the wall toward the front door and peered through the side window. It was Gummer, who had promised to help him with his bags. Tyson opened the door enough to allow him to stick his head out. There stood Gummer in his flowered Hawaiian shirt and bib overalls. Gummer never smiled, having no teeth to display and being conscious of this lack.

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Tyson was tempted to ask Gummer what time it was, but he did not yield to this temptation, such as it was. There was, after all, a Code. There was no rule against a person of Gummer's class seeing a person of Tyson's class in his underwear, especially in such sternly moral underwear as Dr. Bellaman's, but one did not admit to one of Gummer's station that one did not know what time it was, nor indeed that anything pertaining to one's affairs was other than firmly administered. Besides, the sun was high in the sky and shone straight down, revealing the streaks of oily grime in the otherwise colorless hair of the unwashed Gummer. There was plenty of time for making one's toilet and dressing properly, though no time for endless rituals which he might otherwise become hopelessly mired. The presence of Gummer automatically excluded such acts anyway. The things would understand, as would the rooms and the house itself.

"Ah, Gummer, do come right in," said Tyson, opening the door to admit him. It made him cringe inwardly to see Gummer wipe his bare feet on the rough jute doormat. Gummer entered without speaking.

"You may remove these three," Tyson said, indicating three large valises of old but noble leather. "I will bring the toilet case myself." He extracted from his money-belt a greenish coin which Gummer accepted without word or expression before bending to pick up the valises.

Tyson permitted himself a brief moment of revery while combing his hair in the bathroom. He used a more or less lemon-scented oil on his hair and he took special pains with the hair on the sides of his head. When he visualized the Girl, himself with the Girl, he never saw her face clearly, only a generalized cameo profile opposite his own more angular one, as he imagined it would look, her hair shining in its way, his in its. He knew that his own face was much paler in the vision than in real life, but the revery was essentially a thing of carven moonlight anyway. Although he thought of it as happening on the deck of a ship, there were always Japanese lanterns hanging in the background. He supposed that they would have Japanese lanterns on modern ships, on the first class levels at least, for balls and the like.

Gummer went on ahead with the three bags. "I'll be along presently," Tyson said. Still standing in the hallway, he closed his eyes and whispered: "Forgive me, Mother, but there comes a time when a man must . . ." He bit his lower lip. "It is not Goodbye," he added. "It is never Goodbye, actually".

He closed the front door behind him, keeping his eyes closed

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while he tested the knob. He then hastened after Gummer, holding his breath so that the scent of the honeysuckle on the front-porch trellises could not reach out to detain him. In a way it was fortunate that the supermarket and the bowling alley all but isolated the old house from the street. Once he had gained the street there would be no temptation to look back. If the broad lawn—the rolling prairie of his childhood—or the old oak trees or the flowering shrubs had still been there, it would have been impossible.

If the whole town did not already know of Tyson's impending departure, and if the spectacle of Gummer struggling down the street with the three bags did not confirm this fact for any observer, not the dullest person on the street could have failed to understand that Tyson was dressed for something out of the ordinary. His outfitter had been Seymour Praskin, a worldly-wise gargoyle, proprietor of the Cosmopolite Men's Shop. Tyson wore a white linen suit, double breasted because "We are a little portly", the black and white shoes, the flat straw hat with the red ribbon that matched the red cummerbund—the happiest inspiration of all. He had seen men wearing red cummerbunds in the colored advertisements showing gay, carefree passengers on cruise ships. Besides being very dashing, the band of rich material helped suppress the fullness about his middle, which was somewhat exaggerated by the money-belt. Praskin had hastened to agree that it was just the thing. The red motif was reiterated by a "Buddy poppy" in the lapel. This paper flower had been sold to him by a young woman on Main Street, not too long ago, surely. But the crowning touch was the cane, which Praskin had assured him no *bon vivant* should be without. This cane was the latest development in accessories for the sophisticated. The crook unscrewed and the shaft contained three cylindrical flasks in which spirits could be carried. Tyson did not take strong drink, but the ingenuity of the device was not lost on him. He had filled the little flasks with root beer, which would be a little warm to drink, of course, but would be very refreshing if he had to wait for a long time at a pier or a customs shed. It would show people what a provident and up-to-the-minute chap he was. When he swung the cane it hardly gurgled at all. In his other hand he carried the small leather toilet kit, in which, at the last moment, he had packed the moribund alarm clock along with an emergency ration of two peanut butter sandwiches.

Tyson would have liked to say goodbye to Mr. Praskin, but an "Out to Lunch" sign was swinging behind the glass door of the shop

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when he passed. It seemed rather late in the day to be going for lunch, but it was quite possible that he would meet him at Doc's Pharmacy. Surely Doc would have prepared his list of "places" in Paris by this time, knowing that this was Tyson's day of departure.

"Wait here, if you please," Tyson said to Gummer, rummaging under his cummerbund and producing another coin for that faithful retainer.

There were no customers in the drugstore when he entered, but he could see Doc himself just disappearing into the back room. He looked terrible—as though he might be emerging from a particularly bad bout with the bottle. Tyson called after him and Doc returned to the counter, shoulders drooping, eyes squinting painfully. "Hello Tyson," he said. How tired he sounded, poor man.

"Well!" said Tyson, briskly. "Well, *well!*"

"Well what?" asked Doc.

"Well . . . it's about that time."

"That time," said Doc, flatly a nonresponse.

"Why, I'm leaving, you know."

"Oh," said Doc after a long pause.

"Now, I wondered about that *list*. Of places . . ." Tyson winked at Doc with unsquelched cheer.

"List," said Doc with a downward inflection, dead.

"*You* know . . . the list of *places*. In Paris." (Where was the Doc Strathmer of the night of luminous truths?)

"I'm sure I don't know what the hell you're talking about" said Doc, disappearing again into the back room of the shop.

They are not themselves when they drink, thought Tyson. He was puzzled and disappointed by Doc's behaviour, but still undaunted. He proceeded to the bank, Gummer trailing behind with the bags. It was true that Mr. Peters at the bank was a very busy man, but he would have time to say goodbye, surely. Mr. Peters was a man of probity, and to Tyson's almost certain knowledge was not a slave of drink like Doc.

Through the glass door of the bank Tyson could see the girl at the desk nearest the door pick up her telephone, and by the time he had opened the door, Mr. Peters, curiously pale and tense, was approaching him across the shiny floor. The banker smiled somewhat feebly, and because he kept advancing, Tyson backed onto the sidewalk.

"Well . . . Just thought I'd say goodbye. Got a steamer to catch, you know," said Tyson as gaily as he could. Mr. Peter's smile faded.

"Steam . . . ?" He looked over Tyson's shoulder at Gummer, who stood patiently, still holding the heavy bags. "Gummer . . ."

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"Yethir?" said Gummer.

"Gummer . . . You will take proper care of our old friend, won't you?"

"Yethir."

"Well!" said Tyson, briskly, hoping to inject some of his own zest into this strangely funereal exchange. "A journey of ten thousand miles begins with one step. Confucius said that."

"And he was right," said Mr. Peters emphatically. "He was a man." Then, after a pause. "Take care, Tyson."

Tyson had been smiling resolutely all the way down the long street, saluting with his cane the people he knew or the people whose way of stopping in their tracks and staring suggested that they knew him. The latter class predominated. By the time he reached the pier at the foot of the hill the muscles below his cheekbones ached and his mouth was frozen. He almost envied poor Gummer from whom no one expected any expression whatever and whose face, therefore, was always wonderfully slack.

Leaning against the bollards on the pier were two men, one of whom was Dillard Leeks, the one person Tyson wanted least to see at that or any other time. Dillard had been one of the boys with whom Tyson had been expressly forbidden to play as a child. A professional blot-on-the-town, idler and drunkard, nothing in Dillard had changed in all the years Tyson had known him except possibly his sneer, which he no doubt practiced before a mirror to achieve optimum nastiness. His companion of the moment appeared to be of the same ilk—an ilk which the town would do well to expunge by whatever means the law allowed.

The two idlers giggled and nudged one another as Tyson and Gummer approached.

"You! Go ahead!" said Dillard Leeks to his companion.

"No, you!" said his companion. They pushed each other and struggled mightily to save their laughter for later, making noises like caged mice.

"Come, Gummer," said Tyson, drawing himself up to full height. He had to pass between the two sniggering idlers and the great sagging shed which stood on the pier, obstructing the view of the harbor.

At the end of the pier no great steamer waited, nor was there any water as far as the eye could see—only grey tidal flats with little drifts of rubbish here and there, the rotting ribs of dead ships and huge rusty boilers like flayed monsters.

Dillard Leeks closed his eyes and threw back his head. His face expressed an ecstasy like that of a martyr on the rack. His friend shielded his eyes to avoid looking at Tyson. Leeks, in the voice of

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one who struggles to keep from coming apart altogether, called:

"Missed 'er again, eh Tyson?"

At that moment a cruel thing happened, or an avalanche of cruel things, long poised for the moment, broke loose from its high place. The alarm clock in Tyson's toilet kit chose that moment to go off. The muffled sound was loud and obscene—a visceral sound. The two tormentors shrieked with laughter and pounded one another on the arms and shoulders. "Oh, no, no, *no! Too* good!" wailed the nameless one, his face between his knees, slapping the back of his own head with open palms.

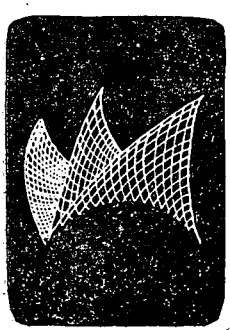
Tyson tried to shout at them, but the only sound to come from him was a long voiceless wheeze. He advanced upon his enemies shaking his cane violently. Suddenly an amber fluid spurted from the cane, leaving a trail of brownish spots on the front of Tyson's white suit. The root beer. Leeks and his friend were reduced to a spastic condition by that unexpected bonus of misfortune.

Gummer put his hand on Tyson's shoulder, a liberty he had never taken before. "Let's go, Mister Tyson," he said. His voice was odd too—more grown-up than Tyson had ever heard it before, deeper but also very gentle.

They turned their backs on the rotting pier and started back up the long hill through the town. The midafternoon sun beat down and heat shimmered on the street.

"Why can't it be dark, Gummer?" asked Tyson in the voice of a very small boy trying not to cry. "Why isn't it ever dark?"

The oceanographers tell us that the polar ice-caps are melting at such a rate that our littorals are shrinking measurably year by year, but those great masses will have to melt much faster if they are to keep up with the comparatively rapid congestion of some of our eastern harbors with alluvial silt, urban refuse, industrial waste, ravaged soil and all the yet uncatalogued kinds of dust.



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Introduction to Harry Harrison's

CAPTAIN HONARIO HARPPLAYER, R.N.

Harry Harrison—husband of elf-small and pretty-witty Joan, father of Todd and Moira—may be described (accurately, if incompletely) as an owl-eyed pear-shaped cyclone with the humor of a super-sophisticated Puck, the bite of a rather misanthropic Gila Monster, and a heart of more than commonly pure gold. Futhermore, he is the only man we ever heard of who was ever struck by lightning on the Isle of Capri. Plucked from his high school graduation by an Army insensitive to belles lettres, *H.H. was sent to serve as an aerial gunner in Texas "until World War II, with this small aid, was won." He next "spent eight years as a commercial artist, editor, publisher, free-lance writer, operator of an art studio (called a* factory *in the trade) dedicated to grinding out comic books, and other loathsome jobs in and around NY magazines until with a shrill scream sold the air conditioner and all furniture and fled with wife and child to Mexico." After this semi-tropical interlude the Harrisons (plus second child) moved to England, then Italy, then Denmark, where—the Relation continues—they "Settled in nicely now thank you in 300 year old* bondegaard, *children in Danish schools, seeing many countries each summer and loving them all. Miss some things about NY, but mostly a good Pastrami sandwich with a new pickle.* Hilse!" *The author of THE STAINLESS STEEL RAT and DEATHWORLD here departs from his usual prose style and spins a fun—ny, fun—ny yarn about the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. Any resemblance between it and the works of one C. S. F-r-st-r is impurely coincidental. All* hands fall to! *Prepare to be amused!*

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CAPTAIN HONARIO HARPPLAYER, R.N.

by Harry Harrison

CAPTAIN HONARIO HARPPLAYER was pacing the tiny quarter-deck of the *H.M.S. Redundant,* hands clasped behind his back, teeth clamped in impotent fury. Ahead of him the battered French fleet limped towards port, torn sails flapping and spars trailing overside in the water, splintered hulls agape where his broadsides had gone thundering through their fragile wooden sides.

"Send two hands for'ard, if you please, Mr. Shrub," he said, "and have them throw water on the mainsail. Wet sails will add an eighth of a knot to our speed and we may overtake those cowardly frogs yet."

"B-but, sir," the stolid first mate Shrub stammered, quailing before the thought of disagreeing with his beloved captain. "If we take any more hands off the pumps we'll sink. We're holed in thirteen places below the waterline, and. . . ."

"Damn your eyes, sir! I issued an order, not a request for a debate. Do as you were told."

"Aye aye, sir," Shrub mumbled, humbled, knuckling a tear from one moist spaniel eye.

Water splashed onto the sails and the *Redundant* instantly sank lower in the water. Harpplayer clasped his hands behind his back and hated himself for this display of unwarranted temper towards the faithful Shrub. Yet he had to keep up this pose of strict disciplinarian before the crew, the sweepings and dregs of a thousand waterfronts, just as he had to wear a girdle to keep up his own front and a truss to keep up his hernia. He had to keep up a good front because he was the captain of this ship, the smallest ship in the blockading fleet to bear a post captain, yet still an important part of the fleet that lay like a strangling noose around Europe, locking in the mad tyrant Napoleon whose dreams of conquest could never extend to England whilst these tiny wooden ships stood in the way.

"Give us a prayer, cap'n, to speed us on our way to 'eaven cause we're sinkin'!" a voice called from the crowd of seamen at the pumps.

"I'll have that man's name, Mr. Dogleg," Harpplayer called to the midshipman, a mere child of sev-

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en or eight, who commanded the detail. "No rum for him for a week."

"Aye aye, sir," piped Mr. Dogleg, who was just learning to talk.

The ship was sinking, the fact was inescapable. Rats were running on deck, ignoring the cursing, stamping sailors, and hurling themselves into the sea. Ahead the French fleet had reach the safety of the shore batteries on Cape Pietfieux and the gaping mouths of these guns were turned towards the *Redundant,* ready to spout fire and death when the fragile ship came within range.

"Be ready to drop sail, Mr. Shrub," Harpplayer said, then raised his voice so all the crew could hear. "Those cowardly Frenchies have run away and cheated us of a million pounds in prize money."

A growl went up from the crew who, next to a love for rum, loved the pounds, shilling and pence with which they could buy the rum. The growl was suddenly cut off in muffled howls of pain as the mainmast, weakened by the badly aimed French cannon, fell onto the mass of laboring men.

"No need to drop sail, Mr. Shrub, the slaves of our friend Boney have done it for us," Harpplayer said, forcing himself to make one of his rare jests so loved by the crew. He hated himself for the falseness of his feelings, ingratiating himself into the sympathies of these illiterate men by such means, but it was his duty to keep a taut ship. Besides, if he didn't make any jokes the men would hate him for the slave-driving, cold-blooded, chance-taking master that he was. They still hated him, of course, but they laughed while they did it.

They were laughing now as they cut away the tangle of rigging and dragged out the bodies to lay them in neat rows upon the deck. The ship sank lower in the water.

"Avast that body dragging," he ordered, "and man the pumps, or we'll have our dinners on the bottom of the sea."

The men laughed a ragged laugh again and hurried to their tasks.

They were easy to please, and Harpplayer envied them their simple lives. Even with the heavy work, bad water and an occasional touch of the cat, their existence was better than his tortured life on the lonely pinnacle of command. The decisions were all his to make, and to a man of his morbid and paranoic nature this made life a living hell. His officers, who all hated him, were incompetents. Even Shrub, faithful, long-suffering, loyal Shrub, had his weakness: namely the fact that he had an I.Q. of about 60 which, combined with his low birth, meant he could never rise above the rank of rear-admiral.

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While he considered the varied events of the day Harpplayer began his compulsive pacing on the tiny quarterdeck, and its other occupants huddled against the starboard side where they wouldn't be in his way. Four paces in one direction, turn, then three-and-a-half paces back with his knee bringing up with a shuddering crack against the port carronade. Yet Harpplayer did not feel this, his cardplayer's brain was whirling with thoughts, evaluating and weighing plans, rejecting those that held a modicum of sanity and only considering those that sounded too insane to be practical. No wonder he was called "Sapsucker Harpy" throughout the fleet and held in awe as a man who could always pull victory from the jaws of defeat, and always at an immense cost in lives. But that was war. You gave your commands and good men died, and that was what the press gangs on shore were for. It had been a long and trying day, yet he still would not permit himself to relax. Tension and the agony of apprehension had seized him in the relentless grip of a Cerberus ever since soon after dawn that morning when the lookout had announced the discovery of sails on the horizon. There had been only ten of them, Frenchy ships of the line, and before the morning fog had cleared the vengeful form of the *Redundant* had been upon them, like a wolf among the sheep. Broadside after broadside had roared out from the precisely serviced English guns, ten balls for every one that popped out of the French cannon, manned by cowardly sweepings of the eighth and ninth classes of 1812, grey-bearded patriarchs and diapered infants who only wished they were back in the familial vinyards instead of here, fighting for the Tyrant, facing up to the wrath of the death-dealing cannon of their island enemy, the tiny country left to fight alone against the might of an entire continent. It had been a relentless stern chase, and only the succor of the French port had prevented the destruction of the entire squadron. As it was, four of them lay among the conger eels on the bottom of the ocean and the remaining six would need a complete refitting before they were fit to leave port and once more dare the retributive might of the ships that ringed their shores.

Harpplayer knew what he had to do.

"If you please, Mr. Shrub, have the hose rigged. I feel it is time for a bath."

A ragged cheer broke from the toiling sailors, since they knew what to expect. In the coldest northern waters or in the dead of winter Harpplayer insisted on this routine of the bath. The hoses were quickly attached to the la-

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boring pumps and soon columns of icy water were jetting across the deck.

"In we go!" shouted Harpplayer, and stepped back well out of the way of any chance droplets, at the same time scratching with a long index finger at the skin of his side, unwashed since the previous summer. He smiled at the childish antics of Shrub and the other officers prancing nude in the water, and only signalled for the pumps to cease their work when all of the white skins had turned a nice cerulean.

There was a rumble, not unlike distant thunder yet sharper and louder, from the northern horizon. Harpplayer turned and for a long instant saw a streak of fire painted against the dark clouds, before it died from the sky, leaving only an after-image in his eyes. He shook his head to clear it, and blinked rapidly a few times. For an instant there he could have sworn that the streak of light had come down, instead of going up, but that was manifestly impossible. Too many late nights playing boston with his officers, no wonder his eyesight was going.

"What was that, Captain?" Lieutenant Shrub asked, his words scarcely audible through the chattering of his teeth.

"A signal rocket—or perhaps one of those new fangled Congreve war rockets. There's trouble over there and we're going to find out just what it is. Send the hands to the braces, if you please, fill the main-tops'l and lay her on the starboard tack."

"Can I put my pants on first?"

"No impertinence, sir, or I'll have you in irons!"

Shrub bellowed the orders through the speaking trumpet and all the hands laughed at his shaking naked legs. Yet in a few seconds the well trained crew, who not six days before had been wenching and drinking ashore on civvy street, never dreaming that the wide-sweeping press gangs would round them up and send them to sea, lept to the braces, hurled the broken spars and cordage overside, sealed the shot holes, buried the dead, drank their grog and still had enough energy left over for a few of their number to do a gay hornpipe. The ship heeled as she turned, water creamed under her bows and then she was on the new tack, reaching out from the shore, investigating this new occurrence, making her presence felt as the representative of the mightiest blockading fleet the world, at that time, had ever known.

"A ship ahead, sir," the masthead lookout called. "Two points off the starboard bow."

"Beat to quarters," Harpplayer ordered.

Through the heavy roll of the drum and the slap of the sailors' bare horny feet on the deck, the

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voice of the lookout could be barely heard.

"No sails nor spars, sir. She's about the size of our longboat."

"Belay that last order. And when that lookout comes off duty I want him to recite five hundred times, a boat is something that's picked up and put on a ship."

Pressed on by the freshing land breeze the *Redundant* closed rapidly on the boat until it could be made out clearly from the deck.

"No masts, no spars, no sails—what makes it move?" Lieutenant Shrub asked with gape-mouthed puzzlement.

"There is no point in speculation in advance, Mr. Shrub. This craft may be French or a neutral so I'll take no chances. Let us have the carronades loaded and run out. And I want the Marines in the futtock-shrowds, with their pieces on the half-cock, if you please. I want no one to fire until they receive my command, and I'll have anyone who does boiled in oil and served for breakfast."

"You are the card, sir!"

"Am I? Remember the cox'in who got his orders mixed yesterday?"

"Very gamey, sir, if I say so," Shrub said, picking a bit of gristle from between his teeth. "I'll issue the orders, sir."

The strange craft was like nothing Harpplayer had ever seen before. It advanced without visible motive power and he thought of hidden rowers with underwater oars, but they would have to be midgets to fit in the boat. It was decked over and appeared to be covered with a glass hutment of some kind. All in all a strange device, and certainly not French. The unwilling slaves of the Octopus in Paris would never master the precise techniques to construct a diadem of the sea such as this. No, this was from some alien land, perhaps from beyond China or the mysterious islands of the east. There was a man seated in the craft and he touched a lever that rolled back the top window. He stood then and waved to them. A concerted gasp ran through the watchers, for every eye in the ship was fastened on this strange occurrence.

"What is this, Mr. Shrub," Harpplayer shouted. "Are we at a fun fair or a Christmas pantomime? Discipline, sir!"

"B-but, sir," the faithful Shrub stammered, suddenly at a loss for words. "That man, sir—he's *green!*"

"I want none of your damn nonsense, sir," Harpplayer snapped irritably, annoyed as he always was when people babbled about their imagined "colors." Paintings, and sunsets and such tripe. Nonsense. The world was made up of healthy shades of grey and that was that. Some fool of a Harley Street quack had once mentioned an imaginary malady which he termed "color

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blindness" but had desisted with his tomfoolery when Harpplayer had mentioned the choice of seconds.

"Green, pink or purple, I don't care what shade of grey the fellow is. Throw him a line and have him up here where we can hear his story."

The line was dropped and after securing it to a ring on his boat the stranger touched a lever that closed the glass cabin once more, then climbed easily to the deck above.

"Green fur . . ." Shrub said, then clamped his mouth shut under Harpplayer's fierce glare.

"Enough of that, Mr. Shrub. He's a foreigner and we will treat him with respect, at least until we find out what class he is from. He is a bit hairy, I admit, but certain races in the north of the Nipponese Isles are that way, perhaps he comes from there. I bid you welcome, sir," he said addressing the man. "I am Captain Honario Harpplayer, commander of His Majesty's ship, *Redundant.*"

"Kwl-kkle-wrrl-kl . . !"

"Not French," Harpplayer muttered, "nor Latin nor Greek I warrant. Perhaps one of those barbaric Baltic tongues, I'll try him on German. *Ich rate Ihnen, Reiseschecks mitzunehmen?* Or an Italian dialect? *E proibito; però qui si vendono cartoline, ricordo.*"

The stranger responded by springing up and down excitedly, then pointing to the sun, making circular motions around his head, pointing to the clouds, making falling motions with his hands, and shrilly shouting *"M'ku, m'ku!"*

"Feller's barmy," the Marine officer said, "and besides, he got too many fingers."

"I can count to seven without your help," Shrub told him angrily, "I think he's trying to tell us it's going to rain."

"He may be a metereologist in his own land," Harpplayer said safely, "but here he is just another alien."

The officers nodded agreement, and this motion seemed to excite the stranger for he sprang forward shouting his unintelligible gibberish. The alert Marine guard caught him in the back of the head with the butt of his Tower musket and the hairy man fell to the deck.

"Tried to attack you, Captain," the Marine officer said. "Shall we keel-haul him, sir?"

"No, poor chap is a long way from home, may be worried. We must allow for the language barrier. Just read him the Articles of War and impress him into the service. We're short of hands after that last encounter."

"You are of a very forgiving nature, sir, and an example for us all. What shall we do with his ship?"

"I'll examine it. There may be some principle of operation here that would be of interest to White-

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hall. Drop a ladder I'll have a look myself."

After some fumbling Harpplayer found the lever that moved the glass cabin, and when it slid aside he dropped into the cockpit that it covered. A comfortable divan faced a board covered with a strange collection of handles, buttons and divers machines concealed beneath crystal covers. It was a perfect example of the decadence of the east, excessive decoration and ornamentation where a panel of good English oak would have done as well, and a simple pivoted bar to carry the instructions to the slaves that rowed the boat. Or perhaps there was an animal concealed behind the panel, he heard a deep roar when he touched a certain lever. This evidently signalled the galley slave—or animal—to begin his labors, since the little craft was now rushing through the water at a good pace. Spray was slapping into the cockpit so Harpplayer closed the cover, which was a good thing. Another button must have tilted a concealed rudder because the boat suddenly plunged its nose down and sank, the water rising up until it washed over the top of the glass. Luckily, the craft was stoutly made and did not leak, and another button caused the boat to surface again.

It was at that instant that Harpplayer had the idea. He sat as one paralyzed, while his rapid thoughts ran through the possibilities. Yes, it might work—it *would* work! He smacked his fist into his open palm and only then realized that the tiny craft had turned while he had been thinking and was about to ram into the *Redundant,* whose rail was lined with frighten-eyed faces. With a skillful touch he signaled the animal (or slave) to stop and there was only the slightest bump as the vessels touched.

"Mr. Shrub," he called.

"Sir?"

"I want a hammer, six nails, six kegs of gunpowder each with a two minute fuse and a looped rope attached, and a dark lantern."

"But, sir—what for?" For once the startled Shrub forgot himself enough to question his captain.

The plan had so cheered Harpplayer that he took no umbrage at this sudden familiarity. In fact he even smiled into his cuff, the expression hidden by the failing light.

"Why—six barrels because there are six ships," he said with unaccustomed coyness. "Now, carry on."

The gunner and his mates quickly completed their task and the barrels were lowered in a sling. They completely filled the tiny cockpit, barely leaving room for Harpplayer to sit. In fact there was no room for the hammer and he had to hold it between his teeth.

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"Mither Thrub," he said indistinctly around the hammer, suddenly depressed as he realized that in a few moments he would be pitting his own frail body against the hordes of the usurper who cracked the whip over a continent of oppressed slaves. He quailed at his temerity at thus facing the Tyrant of Europe, then quailed before his own disgust at his frailty. The men must never know that he had these thoughts, that he was the weakest of them. "Mr. Shrub," he called again, and there was no sound of his feelings in his voice. "If I do not return by dawn you are in command of this ship and will make a full report. Good-by. In triplicate, mind."

"Oh, sir—" Shrub began, but his words were cut off as the glass cover sprang shut and the tiny craft hurled itself against all the power of a continent.

Afterwards Harpplayer was to laugh at his first weakness. Truly, the escapade was as simple as strolling down Fleet Street on a Sunday morning. The foreign ship sank beneath the surface and slipped past the batteries on Cape Pietfieux, that the English sailors called Cape Pitfix, and into the guarded waters of Cienfique. No guard noticed the slight roiling of the waters of the bay and no human eye saw the dim shape that surfaced next to the high wooden wall that was the hull of the French ship of the line. Two sharp blows of the hammer secured the first keg of gunpowder and a brief flash of light came from the dark lantern as the fuse was lit. Before the puzzled sentries on the deck above could reach the rail the mysterious visitor was gone, and they could not see the tell-tale fuse sputtering away, concealed by the barrel of death that it crept slowly toward. Five times Harpplayer repeated this simple, yet deadly, activity, and as he was driving the last nail there was a muffled explosion from the first ship. Hutment closed, he made his way from the harbor, and behind him six ships, the pride of the Tyrant's navy, burnt in pillars of flame until all that was left was the charred hulls, settling to the ocean floor.

Captain Harpplayer opened the glass hutment when he was past the shore batteries, and looked back with satisfaction at the burning ships. He had done his duty and his small part towards ending this awful war that had devastated a continent and would, in the course of a few years, kill so many of the finest Frenchmen that the height of the entire French race would be reduced by an average of more than five inches. The last pyre died down and, feeling a twinge of regret, since they had been fine ships, though in fief to the Madman in Paris, he turned the bow of his craft towards the *Redundant*.

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It was dawn when he reached the ship, and exhaustion tugged at him. He grabbed the ladder lowered for him and painfully climbed to the deck. The drums whirred and the sideboys saluted; the bos'uns' pipes trilled.

"Well done, sir, or well done," Shrub exclaimed, rushing forward to take his hand. "We could see them burning from here."

Behind them, in the water, there was a deep burbling, like the water running from the tub when the plug is pulled, and Harpplayer turned just in time to see the strange craft sinking into the sea and vanishing from sight.

"Damn silly of me," he muttered. "Forgot to close the hatch. Running quite a sea, must have washed in."

His ruminations were sharply cut through by a sudden scream. He turned just in time to see the hairy stranger run to the rail and stare, horrified, at the vanishing craft. Then the man, obviously bereaved, screamed horribly and tore great handfuls of hair from his head, a relatively easy task since he had so much. Then, before anyone could think to stop him, he had mounted to the rail and plunged headfirst into the sea. He sank like a rock, and either could not swim, or did not want to; he seemed strangely attached to his craft, since he did not return to the surface.

"Poor chap," Harpplayer said with the compassion of a sensitive man, "to be alone, and so far from home. Perhaps he is happier dead."

"Aye, perhaps," the stolid Shrub muttered, "but he had the makings of a good topman in him, sir. Could run right out on the spars he could, held on very well he did, what with those long toenails of his that bit right into the wood. Had another toe in his heel that helped him hold on."

"I'll ask you not to discuss the deformities of the dead. We'll list him in the report as Lost Overboard. What was his name?"

"Wouldn't tell us, sir, but we carry him in the books as Mr. Green."

"Fair enough. Though foreign-born, he would be proud to know that he died bearing a good English name." Then, curtly dismissing the faithful and stupid Shrub, Harpplayer resumed walking the quarterdeck, filled with the silent agony which was his and his alone, and would be until the guns of the Corsican Ogre were spiked forever.

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We once saw, honest-Injun, a motel on the outskirts of Long Beach (Cal.), which bore in big letters the neon-lit legend, Morally Clean. *We did not stop to see if its linens were, too . . . Historians, some day, will devote as much attention to motels as they now do to coaching-inns and caravanserais, and no doubt will see them as equally rich in glamor and romance. Perhaps it will even be possible to pin-point the actual court where our courtly Mr. Leiber has laid the scene of this tale of noncourtly love, madness, sanity, and hate! And then again, perhaps not.*

GAME FOR MOTEL ROOM

by Fritz Leiber

SONYA MOVED AROUND THE warm, deeply carpeted motel room in the first gray trickle of dawn as if to demonstrate how endlessly beautiful a body can be if its owner will only let it. Even the body of a woman in, well, perhaps, her forties, Burton judged, smiling at himself in lazy reproof for having thought that grudging word "even." It occurred to him that bodies do not automatically grow less beautiful with age, but that a lot of bodies are neglected, abused and even hated by their owners: women in particular are apt to grow contemptuous and ashamed of their flesh, and this always shows. They start thinking old and ugly and pretty soon they look it. Like a car, a body needs tender constant care, regular tune-ups, an occasional small repair and above all it needs to be intimately loved by its owner and from time to time by an admiring second party, and then it never loses beauty and dignity, even when it corrupts in the end and dies.

Oh, the dawn's a cold hour for philosophy, Burton told himself, and somehow philosophy always gets around to cold topics, just as love-making and all the rest of the best of life make one remember death and even worse things. His lean arm snaked out to a bedside table, came back with a cigarette and an empty folder of matches.

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Sonya noticed. She rummaged in her pale ivory traveling case and tossed him a black, pear-shaped lighter. Burton caught the thing, lit his cigarette, and then studied it. It seemed to be made of black ivory and shaped rather like the grip of a revolver, while the striking mechanism was of blued steel. The effect was sinister.

"Like it?" Sonya asked from across the room.

"Frankly, no. Doesn't suit you."

"You show good taste—or sound instinct. It's a vacation present from my husband."

"He has bad taste? But he married you."

"He has bad everything. Hush, Baby."

Burton didn't mind. Not talking let him concentrate on watching Sonya. Slim and crop-haired, she looked as trimly beautiful as her classic cream-colored, hard-topped Italian sportscar, in which she had driven him to this cosy hideaway from the bar where they'd picked each other up. Her movements now, stooping to retrieve a smoke-blue stocking and trail it across a chair, momentarily teasing apart two ribs in the upward-slanting Venetian blinds to peer at the cold gray world outside, executing a fraction of a dance figure, stopping to smile at emptiness . . . these movements added up to nothing but the rhythms and symbolisms of a dream, yet it was the sort of dream in which actor and onlooker might float forever. In the morning twilight she looked now like a schoolgirl, now like a witch, now like an age-outwitting ballerina out for her twenty-fifth season but still in every way the *premiere danseuse*. As she moved she hummed in a deep contralto voice a tune that Burton didn't recognize, and as she hummed the dim air in front of her lower face seemed to change color very faintly, the deep purples and blues and browns matching the tones of the melody. Pure illusion, Burton was sure, like that which some hashish-eaters and weed-smokers experience during their ecstasy when they hear words as colors, but most enjoyable.

To exercise his mind, now that his body had had its fill and while his eyes were satisfyingly occupied, Burton began to set in order the reasons why a mature lover is preferable to one within yoohooing distance of twenty in either direction. Reason One: she does quite as much of the approach work as you do. Sonya had been both heartwarmingly straightforward and remarkably intuitive at the bar last night. Reason Two: she is generally well-equipped for adventure. Sonya had provided both sportscar and motel room. Reason Three: she does not go into an emotional tailspin after the act of love even if her

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thoughts trend toward death then, like yours do. Sonya seemed both lovely and sensible—the sort of woman it was good to think of getting married to and having children by.

Sonya turned to him with a smile, saying in her husky voice that still had a trace of the hum in it, "Sorry, Baby, but it's quite impossible. Especially your second notion."

"Did you really read my mind?" Burton demanded. "Why couldn't we have children?"

Sonya's smile deepened. She said, "I think I will take a little chance and tell you why." She came over and sat on the bed beside him and bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

"That was nice," Burton said lazily. "Did it mean something special?"

She nodded gravely. "It was to make you forget everything I'm going to tell you."

"How—if I'm to understand what you tell?" he asked.

"After a while I will kiss you again on the forehead and then you will forget everything I have told you in between. Or if you're very good, I'll kiss you on the nose and then you'll remember—but be unable to tell anyone else."

"If you say so," Burton smiled. "But what is it you're going to tell me?"

"Oh," she said, "just that I'm from another planet in a distant star cluster. I belong to a totally different species. We could no more start a child than a Chihauhau and a cat or a giraffe and a rhinoceros. Unlike the mare and the donkey we could not even get a cute little sterile mule with glossy fur and blue bows on his ears."

Burton grinned. He had just thought of Reason Four: a really grown-up lover plays the most delightfully childish nonsense games.

"Go on," he said.

"Well," she said, "superficially of course I'm very like an Earth woman. I have two arms and two legs and *this* and *these* . . ."

"For which I am eternally grateful," he said.

"You like them, eh?"

"Oh yes—especially *these.*"

"Well, watch out—they don't even give milk, they're used in esping. You see, inside I'm very different," she said. "My mind is different too. It can do mathematics faster and better than one of your electric calculating machines—"

"What's two and two?" Burton wanted to know.

"Twenty-two," she told him, "and also one hundred in the binary system and eleven in the trinary and four in the duodecimal. I have perfect recall—I can remember every least thing I've ever done and every word of every book I've leafed through. I can

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read unshielded minds—in fact anything up to triple shielding—and hum in colors. I can direct my body heat so that I never really need clothes to keep me warm at temperatures above freezing. I can walk on water if I concentrate, and even fly—though I don't do it here because it would make me conspicuous."

"Especially at the present moment," Burton agreed, "though it would be a grand sight. Why *are* you here, by the way, and not behaving yourself on your home planet?"

"I'm on vacation," she grinned. "Oh yes, we use your rather primitive planet for vacations—like you do Africa and the Canadian forests. A little machine teaches us during one night's sleep several of your languages and implants in our brains the necessary background information. My husband surprised me by giving me the money for this vacation—same time he gave me the lighter. Usually he's very stingy. But perhaps he had some little plot—an affair with his chief nuclear chemist, I'd guess—of his own in mind and wanted me out of the way. I can't be sure though, because he always keeps his mind quadruple-shielded, even from me."

"So you have husbands on your planet," Burton observed.

"Yes indeed! Very jealous and possessive ones, too, so watch your step, Baby. Yes, although my planet is much more advanced than yours we still have husbands and wives and a very stuffy system of monogamy—*that* seems to go on forever and everywhere—oh yes, and on my planet we have death and taxes and life insurance and wars and all the rest of the universal idiocy!"

She stopped suddenly. "I don't want to talk about that any more," she said. "Or about my husband. Let's talk about you. Let's play truths, deep-down truths. What's the thing you're most afraid of in the whole world?"

Burton chuckled—and then frowned. "You really want me to give you the honest answer?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "It's the first rule of the game."

"Well," he said, "I'm most afraid of something going wrong with my brain. *Growing* wrong, really. Having a brain tumor. That's it." He had become rather pale.

"Oh Poor Baby," Sonya said. "Just you wait a minute."

Still uneasy from his confession, Burton started nervously to pick up Sonya's black lighter, but its black pistol-look repelled him.

Sonya came bustling back with something else in her right hand. "Sit up," she said, putting her left arm around him. "No, none of *that*—this is serious. Pretend I'm a very proper lady doctor who forgot to get dressed."

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Burton could see her slim back and his own face over her right shoulder in the wide mirror of the dresser. She slipped her right hand and the small object it held behind his head. There was a click.

"No," said Sonya cheerily. "I can't see a sign of anything wrong in your brain or likely to grow wrong. It's as healthy as an infant's. *What's the matter, Baby?*"

Burton was shaking. "Look," he gasped reproachfully, "it's wonderful to play nonsense games, but when you use magic tricks or hypnotism to back them up, that's cheating."

"What do you mean?"

"When you clicked that thing," he said with difficulty, "I saw my head turn for a moment into a pinkish skull and then into just a pulsing blob with folds in it."

"Oh, I'd forgotten the mirror," she said, glancing over her shoulder. "But you were really just imagining things. Or having a mild optical spasm and seeing colors.

"No," she added as he reached out a hand, "I won't let you see my little XYZ-ray machine." She tossed it across the room into her traveling case. "It would spoil our nonsense game."

As his breathing and thoughts quieted, Burton decided she was possibly right—or at least that he'd best pretend she was right. It was safest and sanest to think of what he'd glimpsed in the mirror as an illusion, like the faint colors he'd fancied forming in front of her humming lips. Perhaps Sonya had an effect on him like hashish or some super-marijuana—a plausible enough idea considering how much more powerful drug a beautiful woman is than any opiate or resin. Nevertheless—

"All right, Sonya," he said, "what's *your* deepest fear?"

She frowned. "I don't want to tell you."

"*I* stuck to the rules."

"Very well," she nodded, "it's that my husband will go crazy and kill me. That's a much more dreadful fear on my planet than yours, because we've conquered all diseases and we each of us can live forever (though it's customary to disintegrate after forty to fifty thousand years) and we each of us have tremendous physical and mental powers—so that the mere thought of any genuine insanity is dreadfully shocking. Insanity is so nearly unknown to us that even our advanced intuition doesn't work on it—and what is unknown is always most frightening. By insanity I don't mean minor irrationalities. We have those, all right—my husband for instance, is bugged on the number 33, he won't begin any important venture except on the thirty-third day of the month—and me, I have a weakness for black-haired babies from primitive planets."

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"Hey, wait a minute," Burton objected, "you said the thirty-third day of the month."

"On my planet the months are longer. Nights too. You'd love them—more time for demonstrating affection and empathy."

Burton looked at her broodingly. "You play this nonsense game pretty seriously," he said. "Like you'd read nothing but science fiction all your life."

Sonya shrugged her lovely shoulders. "Maybe there's more in science fiction than you realize. But now we've had enough to that game. Come on, Black-Haired Baby, let's play—"

"Wait a minute," Burton said sharply. She drew back, making a sulky mouth at him. He made his own grim, or perhaps his half-emerged thoughts did that for him.

"So you've got a husband on your planet," he said, "and he's got tremendous powers and you're deathly afraid he'll go crazy and try to kill you. And now he does an out-of-character thing by giving you vacation money and—"

"Oh yes!" she interrupted agitatedly, "and he's such a dreadful mixed-up superman and he always keeps up that permissible but uncustomary quadruple shield and he looks at me with such a secret gloating viciousness when we're alone that I'm choke-full of fear day and night and I've wished and wished I could really get something on him so that I could run to an officer of public safety and have the maniac put away, but I can't, I can't, he never makes a slip, and I begin to feel *I'm* going crazy—*I*, with my supremely trained and guarded mind—and I just *have* to get away to vacation planets and forget him in loving someone else. Come on, Baby, let's—"

"Wait a minute!" Burton commanded. "You say you've insurance on your planet. Are you insured for much?"

"A very great deal. Perfect health and a life-expectancy of fifty thousand years makes the premiums cheap."

"And your husband is the beneficiary?"

"Yes, he is. Come on, Burton, let's not talk about him. Let's—"

"No!" Burton said, pushing her back. "Sonya, what does your husband do? What's his work?"

Sonya shrugged. "He manages a bomb factory," she said listlessly and rapidly. "I work there too. I told you we had wars—they're between the league our planet belongs to and another star cluster. You've just started to discover the super-bombs on Earth—the fission bomb, the fusion bomb. They're clumsy oversize toys. The bombs my husbnd's factory manufactures can each of them destroy a planet. They're really fuses for starting the matter of the planet disintegrating spontaneously so that it

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flashes into a little star. Yet the bombs are so tiny you can hold one in your hand. In fact, this cigarette lighter is an exact model of one of them. The models were for Cosmos Day presents to top officials. My husband gave me his along with the vacation money. Burton, reach me one of your foul Earth cigarettes, will you? If you're going to refuse the other excitements, I've got to have something."

Burton automatically shook some cigarettes from his pack. "Tell me one more thing, Sonya," he rapped out. "You say you have a perfect memory. How many times have you struck that cigarette lighter since your husband gave it to you?"

"Thirty-one times," she answered promptly. "Counting the one time you used it."

She flicked it on and touched the tiny blue flame to her cigarette, inhaled deeply, then let the tiny snuffer snap down the flame. Twin plumes of faint smoke wreathed from her nostrils. "Thirty-two now." She held the black pear-shaped object towards him, her thumb on the knurled steel-blue trigger. "Shall I give you a light?"

"NO!" Burton shouted. "Sonya, as you value your life and mine —and the lives of three billion other primitives—don't work that lighter again. Put it down."

"All right, all right, Baby," she said smiling nervously and dropping the black thing on the white sheet. "Why's Baby so excited?"

"Sonya," Burton said, "Maybe *I'm* crazy, or maybe you *are* only playing a nonsense game backed up with hypnotism—but . . ."

Sonya stopped smiling. "What is it, Baby?"

Burton said, "If you really do come from another planet where there is almost no insanity, homicidal or otherwise, what I'm going to tell you will be news. Sonya, we've just lately had several murders on Earth where a man plants a time-bomb on a big commercial airplane to explode it in the air and kill all its passengers and crew just to do away with one single person—generally for the sake of collecting a big life-insurance policy. Now if an Earth-murderer could be cold-blooded or mad enough to do that, why mightn't a super-murderer—"

"Oh no," Sonya said slowly, "not blow up a whole planet to get rid of just one person—" She started to tremble.

"Why not?" Burton demanded. "Your husband is crazy, only you can't prove it. He hates you. He stands to collect a fortune if you die in an accident—such as a primitive vacation planet exploding. He presents you with money for a vacation on such a planet and at the same time he gives you a cigarette lighter that is an exact model of—"

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"I can't believe it," Sonya said very faintly, still shaking, her eyes far away. "Not a whole planet . . ."

"But that's the sort of thing insanity can be, Sonya. What's more, you can check it," Burton rapped out flatly. "Use that XYZ-ray gadget of yours to look through the lighter."

"But he *couldn't*," Sonya murmured, her eyes still far away. "Not even *he* could . . ."

"Look through the lighter," Burton repeated.

Sonya picked up the black thing by its base and carried it over to her traveling case.

"Remember not to flick it," Burton warned her sharply. "You'd told me he was bugged on the number thirty-three, and I imagine that would be about the right number to allow to make sure you were settled on your vacation planet before anything happened."

He saw the shiver travel down her back as he said that and suddenly Burton was shaking so much himself he couldn't possibly have moved. Sonya's hands were on the other side of her body from him, busy above her traveling case. There was a click and her pinkish skeleton showed through her. It was not quite the same as the skeleton of an Earth human—there were *two* long bones in the upper arms and upper legs, fewer ribs, but what looked like two tiny skulls in the chest.

She turned around, not looking at him.

"You were right," she said.

She said, *"Now I've got the evidence to put my husband away for ever! I can't wait!"*

She whirled into action, snatching articles of clothing from the floor, chairs and dresser, whipping them into her traveling case. The whole frantic little dance took less than ten seconds. Her hand was on the outside door before she paused.

She looked at Burton. She put down her traveling case and came over to the bed and sat down beside him.

"Poor Baby," she said. "I'm going to have to wipe out your memory and yet you were so very clever—I really mean that, Burton."

He wanted to object, but he felt paralyzed. She put her arms around him and moved her lips towards his forehead. Suddenly she said, "No, I can't do that. There's got to be some reward for you."

She bent her head and kissed him pertly on the nose. Then she disengaged herself, hurried to her bag, picked it up, and opened the door.

"Besides," she called back. "I'd hate you to forget any part of me."

"Hey," Burton yelled, coming to life, "You can't go out like that!"

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because you haven't a stitch of clothes on!"

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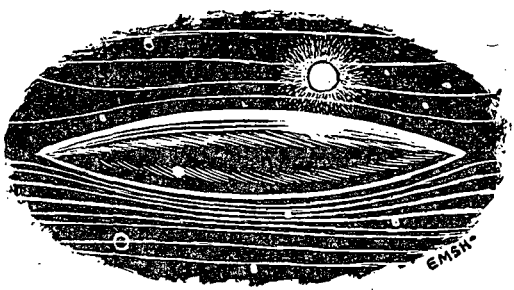
"On my planet we don't wear them!"

The door slammed behind her. Burton sprang out of bed and threw it open again.

He was just in time to see the sportscar take off—straight up.

Burton stood in the open door for half a minute, stark naked himself, looking around at the unexploded Earth. He started to say aloud, "Gosh, I didn't even get the name of her planet," but his lips were sealed.



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Our patient readers will find below yet another one of Dr. Asimov's insufferably tedious articles. This time he purports to teach them a language which is part Keltic and part chemical. We ourself once spent three entire days in the West of Ireland, and during the whole of this time in that beautiful, green (and slightly soggy) land the only person we found who didn't talk English was an elderly Armenian (who didn't talk any *language, as near as we could tell, except elderly Armenian). Assuming, then, that Professor A. succeeds in teaching you the Gaelic—Gentle Reader, to whom will you speak it, to whom? We have but one single word of the darling language (it also embodies all we know or ever need to know of chemistry), it has saved our life on occasions innumerable, its original form was* usquebaugh *or* uisgebeatha—*meaning Water of Life—and in the accursed Saxon tongue it's pronounced* whiskey. *Make ours a double, Leo. Ike don't drink.*

YOU, TOO, CAN SPEAK GAELIC

by Isaac Asimov

IT IS DIFFICULT TO PROVE TO THE MAN IN THE STREET THAT ONE is a chemist. At least, when one is a chemist after my fashion (strictly arm-chair).

Faced with a miscellaneous stain on a garment of unknown composition, I am helpless. I say, "Have you tried a dry-cleaner?" with a rising inflection that disillusions everyone within earshot at once. I cannot look at a paste of dubious composition and tell what it is good for just

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by smelling it; and I haven't the foggiest notion what a drug, identified only by trade-name, may have in it.

It is not long, in short, before the eyebrows move upward, the wise smiles shoot from lip to lip and the hoarse whispers begin, "Some chemist! Wonder what barber college *he* went to?"

There is nothing to do but wait. Sooner or later, on some breakfast cereal box, on some pill dispenser, on some bottle of lotion, there will appear an 18-syllable name of a chemical. Then, making sure I have a moment of silence, I will say carelessly, "Ah, yes" and rattle it off like a machine-gun, reducing everyone for miles around to stunned amazement.

Because, you see, no matter how inept I may be at the practical aspects of chemistry, I speak the language fluently.

But, alas, I have a confession to make. It isn't hard to speak chemistry. It just looks hard because organic chemistry (that branch of chemistry with the richest supply of nutcracker names) was virtually a German monopoly in the 19th Century. The Germans, for some reason known only to themselves, push words together and eradicate all traces of any seam between them. What we would express as a phrase, they treat as one interminable word. They did this to the names of their organic compounds and in English those names were slavishly adopted with minimum change.

It is for that reason, then, that you can come up to a perfectly respectable compound which, to all appearances is just lying there, harming no one, and find that it has a name like para-dimethylaminobenzaldehyde. (And that is rather short, as such names go.)

To the average person, used to words of a respectable size, this conglomeration of letters is offensive and irritating, but actually, if you tackle it from the front and work your way slowly toward the back, it isn't bad. Pronounce it this way: PA-ruh-dy-METH-il-a-MEE-noh-ben-ZAL-duh-hide. If you accent the capitalized syllables, you will discover that after a while, you can say it rapidly and without trouble and can impress your friends no end.

What's more, now that you can say the word, you will appreciate something that once happened to me. I was introduced to this particular compound some years ago, because when dissolved in hydrochloric acid, it is used to test for the presence of a compound called glucosamine and this was something I earnestly yearned to do at the time.

So I went to the reagent shelf and said to someone, "Do we have any para-dimethylaminobenzaldehyde?"

And he said, "What you mean is PA-ruh-dy-METH-il-a-MEE-noh-

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ben-ZAL-duh-hide", and he sang it to the tune of the "Irish Washerwoman".

If you don't know the tune of the "Irish Washerwoman" all I can say is that it is an Irish jig; in fact, it is *the* Irish jig; if you heard it, you would know it. I venture to say that if you know only one Irish jig, or if you try to make up an Irish jig, that's the one.

It goes: DUM-dee-dee-DUM-dee-dee-DUM-dee-dee-DUM-dee-dee, and so on almost indefinitely.

For a moment I was flabbergasted and then, realizing the enormity of having someone dare be whimsical at my expense, I said, "Of course! It's dactylic tetrameter."

"What?" he said.

I explained. A dactyl is a set of three syllables of which the first is accented and the next two are not, and a line of verse is dactylic tetrameter when four such sets of syllables occur in it. Anything in dactylic feet can be sung to the tune of the "Irish Washerwoman." You can sing most of Longfellow's "Evangeline" to it, for instance, and I promptly gave the fellow a sample:

"THIS is the FO-rest pri-ME-val. The MUR-muring PINES and the HEM-locks—" and so on and so on.

He was walking away from me by then, but I followed him at a half-run. "In fact," I went on, "anything in iambic feet can be sung to the tune of Dvorak's 'Humoresque." (You know the one— de-DUM-dee-DUM-dee-DUM-dee-DUM-dee-DUM—and so on forever.)

For instance, I said, you could sing Portia's speech to the "Humoresque" like this: "The QUALITY of MERcy IS not STRAINED it DROPpeth AS the GENtle RAIN from HEAV'N uPON the PLACE beNEATH."

He got away from me by then and didn't show up at work again for days, and serve him right.

However, I didn't get off scot-free myself. Don't think it. I was haunted for weeks by those drumming dactylic feet. PA-ruh-dy-METH-il-a-MEE-noh-ben-ZAL-duh-hide-PA-ruh-dy-METH-il-a-MEE-noh— went my brain over and over. It scrambled my thoughts, interfered with my sleep and reduced me to mumbling semi-madness for I would go about muttering it savagely under my breath to the alarm of all innocent bystanders.

Finally, the whole thing was exorcized and it came about in this fashion. I was standing at the desk of a receptionist waiting for a chance to give her my name in order that I might get in to see somebody. She was a very pretty Irish receptionist and so I was in no

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hurry because the individual I was to see was very masculine and I preferred the receptionist. So I waited patiently and smiled at her; and then her patent Irishness stirred that drum-beat memory in my mind so that I sang in a soft voice (without even realizing what I was doing) PA-ruh-dy-METH-il-a-MEE-noh-ben-ZAL-duh-hide . . . through several rapid choruses.

And the receptionist clapped her hands together in delight and cried out, *"Oh, my, you know it in the original Gaelic!"*

What could I do? I smiled modestly and had her announce me as Isaac O'Asimov.

From that day to this I haven't sung it once except in telling this story. It was gone, for after all folks, in my heart I know I don't know one word of Gaelic.

But what are these syllables that sound so Gaelic? Let's trace them to their lair, one by one, and make sense of them, if we can. Perhaps you will then find that you, too, can speak Gaelic.

Let's begin with a tree of Southeast Asia, one that is chiefly found in Sumatra and Java. It exudes a reddish-brown resin that, on being burnt, yields a pleasant odor. Arab traders had penetrated the Indian Ocean and its various shores during medieval times and had brought back this resin, which they called "Javanese incense." Of course, they called it that in Arabic, so that the phrase came out "luban javi."

When the Europeans picked up the substance from Arabic traders, the Arabic name was just a collection of nonsense syllables to them. The first syllable "lu" sounded as though it might be the definite article ("lo" is one of the words for "the" in Italian; "le" and "la" are "the" in French and so on.) Consequently, the European traders thought of the substance as "the banjavi" or simply as "banjavi."

That made no sense, either, and it got twisted in a number of ways; to "benjamin" for instance (because that, at least, was a familiar word) to "benjoin" and then finally, about 1650, to "benzoin." In English, the resin is now called "gum benzoin."

About 1608, an acid substance was isolated from the resin and that was eventually called "benzoic acid." Then, in 1834, a German chemist, Eilhart Mitscherlich, converted benzoic acid (which contains two oxygen atoms in its molecule) into a compound which contains no oxygen atoms at all, but only carbon and hydrogen atoms. He named the new compound "benzin," the first syllable signifying its ancestry.

Another German chemist, Justus Liebig objected to the suffix "-in" which, he said, was used only for compounds that contained nitrogen

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atoms, which Mitscherlich's "benzin" did not. In this, Liebig was correct. However, he suggested the suffix "-ol", signifying the German word for "oil" because the compound mixed with oils rather than with water. This was as bad as "-in", however, for, as I shall shortly explain, the suffix "-ol" is used for other purposes by chemists. However, the name caught on in Germany, where the compound is still referred to as "benzol."

In 1845, still another German chemist (I told you organic chemistry was a German monopoly in the 19th Century) August W. von Hofmann, suggested the name "benzene" and this is the name properly used in most of the world, including the United States. I say, properly, because the "-ene" ending is routinely used for many molecules containing hydrogen and carbon atoms only ("hydrocarbons") and therefore it is a good ending and a good name.

The molecule of benzene consists of six carbon atoms and six hydrogen atoms. The carbon atoms are arranged in a hexagon and to each of them is attached a single hydrogen atom. I have every impulse to present you with the formula by arranging six C's (for carbon) in a hexagon and attached an H (for hydrogen) to each. However, such shenanigans are frowned upon in the august pages of this periodical and I shall content myself with stating (with a feeling of sad inadequacy) that the formula of benzene is C_6H_6.

You will have noted, perhaps, that in the long and tortuous pathway from the island of Java to the molecule of benzene, the letters of the island have been completely lost. There is not a "j," not an "a" and not a "v" in the word "benzene."

Nevertheless, we've arrived somewhere. If you go back to the Irish washerwoman compound, para-dimethylaminobenzaldehyde, you will not fail to note the syllable "benz." Now you know where it comes from.

Having gotten this far, let's start on a different track altogether.

Women being what they are (three cheers), they have for centuries been shading their eyelashes and upper eyelids and eye-corners in order to make their eyes look large, dark, mysterious and enticing. In ancient times, they used for this purpose some dark pigment (an antimony compound, often) which was ground up into a fine powder. It had to be a *very* fine powder, of course, because lumpy shading would look awful.

The Arabs, with an admirable directness, referred to this cosmetic powder as "the finely divided powder." Only, once again, they used Arabic and it came out "al-kulhl" where the "h" is pronounced in a gutteral way I can't imitate, and where "al" is the Arabic word for "the".

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The Arabs were the great alchemists of the early Middle Ages and when the Europeans took up alchemy in the late Middle Ages, they adopted many Arabic terms. The Arabs had begun to use "al-kuhl" as a name for any finely divided powder, without reference to cosmetic needs, and so did the Europeans. But they pronounced the word, and spelled it, in various ways that were climaxed with "alcohol."

As it happened, alchemists were never really at ease with gases or vapors. They didn't know what to make of them. They felt, somehow, that the vapors were not quite material in the same sense that liquids or solids were and so they referred to the vapors as "spirits." They were particularly impressed with substances that gave off "spirits" even at ordinary temperatures (and not only when heated) and of these, the most important in medieval times, was wine. So alchemists would speak of "spirits of wine" for the volatile component of wine (and we ourselves may speak of alcoholic beverages as "spirits" though we will also speak of "spirits of turpentine").

Then, too, when a liquid vaporizes it seems to powder away to nothing, so spirits also received the name of "alcohol" and the alchemists would speak of "alcohol of wine." By the 17th Century, the word "alcohol" all by itself stood for the vapors given off by wine.

In the early 19th Century, the molecular structure of these vapors was determined. The molecule turned out to consist of two carbon atoms and an oxygen atom in a straight line. Three hydrogen atoms are attached to the first carbon, two hydrogen atoms to the second and a single hydrogen atom to the oxygen. The formula can therefore be written as CH_3CH_2OH.

The hydrogen-oxygen group (-OH) is referred to in abbreviated form as a "hydroxyl group." Chemists began to discover numerous compounds in which a hydroxyl group is attached to a carbon atom as it is in the alcohol of wine. All these compounds came to be referred to generally as alcohols, and each was given a special name of its own.

For instance, the alcohol of wine contains a group of two carbon atoms to which a total of five hydrogen atoms are attached. This same combination was discovered in a compound first isolated in 1540. This compound is even more easily vaporized than alcohol is and the liquid disappears so quickly that it seems to be overwhelmingly eager to rise to its home in the high heavens. Aristotle had referred to the material making up the high heavens as "aether" so in 1730 this easily vaporized material received the name "spiritus aethereus" or, in English, "etherial spirits." This was eventually shortened to "ether."

The two-carbon-five-hydrogen group in ether (there were two of these

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in each ether molecule) was naturally called the "ethyl group" and since the alcohol of wine contained this group, it came to be called "ethyl alcohol" about 1850.

It came to pass, then, that chemists found it sufficient to give the name of a compound the suffix "-ol" to indicate that it was an alcohol, and possessed a hydroxyl group. That is the reason for the objection to "benzol" as a name for the compound C_6H_6. Benzene contains no hydroxyl group and is not an alcohol and should be called "benzene" and not "benzol." You hear?

It is possible to remove two hydrogen atoms from an alcohol, taking away the single hydrogen that is attached to the oxygen, and one of the hydrogens attached to the adjoining carbons. Instead of a molecule such as CH_3CH_2OH, you would have a molecule like CH_3CHO.

Liebig (the man who had suggested the naughty word "benzol") accomplished this task in 1835 and was the first actually to isolate CH_3CHO. Since the removal of hydrogen atoms is, naturally, a "dehydrogenation," what Liebig had was a dehydrogenated alcohol and that's what he called it. Since he used Latin, however, the phrase was "alcohol dehydrogenatus."

That is a rather long name for a simple compound and chemists, being as human as the next fellow (honest!), have the tendency to shorten long names by leaving out syllables. Take the first syllable of "alcohol" and the first two syllables of "dehydrogenatus", run the result together, and you have "aldehyde."

It came to pass therefore that the combination of a carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atom (-CHO) which forms such a prominent portion of the molecule of dehydrogenated alcohol came to be called the "aldehyde group" and any compound containing it came to be called an "aldehyde."

For instance, if we return to benzene, C_6H_6, and imagine one of its hydrogen atoms removed, and in its place a -CHO group inserted, we would have C_6H_5CHO and that compound would be "benzene-aldehyde" or, to use the shortened form that is universally employed, "benzaldehyde."

Now let's move back in time again to the ancient Egyptians. The patron god of the Egyptian city of Thebes on the Upper Nile was named Amen or Amun. When Thebes gained the hegemony over Egypt, as it did during the 18th and 19th dynasties, the time of Egypt's greatest military power, Amen naturally gained hegemony over the Egyptian gods. He rated many temples, including one on an oasis in the north

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African desert, well to the west of the main center of Egyptian culture. This one was well-known to the Greeks and, later, the Romans, who spelled the name of the god, "Ammon."

Any desert area has a problem when it comes to finding fuel. One available fuel in North Africa is camel dung. The soot of the burning camel dung, which settled out on the walls and ceiling of the temple, contained white, salt-like crystals, which the Romans then called "sal ammoniac" meaning "salt of Ammon." (The expression "sal ammoniac" is still good pharmacist's-jargon, but chemists call the substance "ammonium chloride" now.)

In 1774, an English chemist, Joseph Priestley, discovered that heating sal ammoniac produced a vapor with a pungent odor, and in 1782, the Swedish chemist, Torbern Olof Bergmann, suggested the name "ammonia" for this vapor. Three years later, a French chemist, Claude Louis Berthollet, worked out the structure of the ammonia molecule. It consisted of a nitrogen atom to which three hydrogen atoms were attached so that we can write it NH_3.

As time went on, chemists who were studying organic compounds (that is, compounds that contained carbon atoms) found that it often happened that a combination made up of a nitrogen atom and two hydrogen atoms ($-NH_2$) was attached to one of the carbon atoms in the organic molecule. The resemblance of this combination to the ammonia molecule was clear and by 1860, the $-NH_2$ group was being called an "amine group" to emphasize the similarity.

Well, then, if we go back to our benzaldehyde, C_6H_5CHO and imagine a second hydrogen atom removed from the original benzene and in its place an amine group inserted, we would have $C_6H_4(CHO)(NH_2)$ and that would be "aminobenzaldehyde."

Earlier I talked about the alcohol of wine, CH_3CH_2OH, and said it was "ethyl alcohol." It can also be called (and frequently is), "grain alcohol" because it is obtained from the fermentation of grain. But as I hinted, it is not the only alcohol; far from it. As far back as 1661, the English chemist, Robert Boyle, found that if he heated wood in the absence of air, he obtained vapors, some of which condensed into clear liquid.

In this liquid he detected a substance rather similar to ordinary alcohol, but not quite the same. (It is more easily evaporated than ordinary alcohol, and it is considerably more poisonous to mention two quick differences.) This new alcohol was called "wood alcohol."

However, for a name really to sound properly authoritative in sci-

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ence, what is wanted is something in Greek or Latin. The Greek word for "wine" is "methy" and the Greek word for "wood" is "yli." To get "wine from wood" (i.e. "wood alcohol") stick the two Greek words together and you have "methyl." The first to do this was the Swedish chemist, Jons Jakob Berzelius, about 1835, and ever since then wood alcohol has been "methyl alcohol" to chemists.

The formula for methyl alcohol was worked out in 1834 by a French chemist named Jean Baptiste André Dumas (no relation to the novelist, as far as I know.) It turned out to be simpler than that of ethyl alcohol and to contain but one carbon atom. The formula is written, CH_3OH. For this reason, a grouping of one carbon atom and three hydrogen atoms ($-CH_3$) came to be referred to as a "methyl group."

The French chemist, Charles Adolphe Wurtz (he was born in Alsace which accounts for his Germanic name), discovered in 1849 that one of the two hydrogen atoms of the amine group could be replaced by a methyl group, so that the endproduct looked like this $-NHCH_3$. This would naturally be a "methylamine group." If both hydrogen atoms were replaced by methyl groups, the formula would be $-N(CH_3)_2$ and we would have a "dimethylamine group." (The prefix "di-" is from the Greek "dis" meaning "twice." The methyl group is added to the amine group twice, in other words.)

Now we can go back to our aminobenzaldehyde, $C_6H_4(CHO)(NH_2)$. If, instead of an amino group, we had used a dimethylamine group, the formula would be $C_6H_4(CHO)(N(CH_3)_2)$ and the name would be "dimethylaminobenzaldehyde."

Let's think about benzene once again. Its molecule is a hexagon made up of six carbon atoms, each with a hydrogen atom attached. We have substituted an aldehyde group for one of the hydrogen atoms and a dimethylamine group for another, to form dimethylaminobenzaldehyde, but *which* two hydrogen atoms have we substituted?

In a perfectly symmetrical hexagon, such as that which is the molecule of benzene, there are only three ways in which you can choose two hydrogen atoms. You can take the hydrogen atoms of two adjoining carbon atoms; or you can take the hydrogens of two carbon atoms so selected that one untouched carbon-hydrogen combination lies between; or you can take them so that two untouched carbon-hydrogen combinations lie between.

If you number the carbon atoms of the hexagon in order, one through six, then the three possible combinations involve carbons 1,2; 1,3; and 1,4 respectively. I mustn't draw diagrams here, but if you draw one for

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yourself (it is simple enough) you will see that no other combinations are possible. All the different combinations of two carbon atoms in the hexagon boil down to one or another of these three cases.

Chemists have evolved a special name for each combination. The 1,2 combination is "ortho" from a Greek word meaning "straight." Why "ortho" should be used, I am not sure, but my guess is that when, in a formula, chemical groups are written on two adjoining angles of a benzene hexagon, they can be written one under the other in a straight line. (I know that sounds weak, but I have never seen an official explanation, and I can't think of anything else.)

The prefix "meta-" comes from a Greek word meaning "in the midst of" but it also has a secondary meaning, "next after." That makes it suitable for the 1,3 combination. You substitute the first carbon, leave the next untouched, and substitute the one "next after."

The prefix "para-" is from a Greek word meaning "beside" or "side by side." If you mark the 1,4 angles on a hexagon and turn it so that the 1 is at the extreme left, then the 4 will be at the extreme right. The two are indeed "side by side" and so "para-" is used for the 1,4 combination.

Now we know where we are. When we say, "para-dimethylaminobenzaldehyde," we mean that the dimethylamine group and the aldehyde group are in the 1,4 relationship to each other. They are at opposite ends of the benzene ring and we can write the formula $CHOC_6H_4N(CH_3)_2$.

And there you are.

Now that you know Gaelic, what do you suppose the following are?

1) alpha-dee-glucosido-beta-dee-fructofuranoside
2) two,three-dihydro-three-oxobenzisosulfonazole
3) delta-four-pregnene-seventeen-alpha, twenty-one, diol-three, eleven, twenty-trione
4) three-(four-amino-two-methylpyrimidyl-five-methyl)-four-methyl-five-beta-hydroxyethylthiazolium chloride hydrochloride.

Just in case your Gaelic is still a little rusty, I will give you the answers. They are:

1) table sugar
2) saccharin
3) cortisone
4) vitamin B_1

Isn't it simple?

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In the first place, it's pronounced Van Sy-ock-so there. This funny story of a different *way in which future American society deals with the problem of Social Adjustment (if that is indeed the* mot juste*) was written by a new writer who graduated high school and southern Indiana five years ago to become an Air Force wife. Despite several solo cross-country flights, Sydney Van Scyoc says she is not now flying and does not intend to fly again until she overcomes her fear of "forms, clearances and radio procedures—or until these things have been eliminated." We wish her luck; and, in the meanwhile, are pleased to pluck the fruits of her being grounded—as for instance you take this story of the Unnamed Heroine who was frantic, of Birk who was unstable and silly and exitable, of Cordon who was decisive and strong and disciplined, and of Zack who was—*yech!

ZACK WITH HIS SCAR

by Sydney Van Scyoc

WHEN SHE BLAZED FROM THE lifter clearing that morning Zack abandoned his sometimes-bench, which flickered and became a shrub, and slouched after her, scarred and ugly head held low. Her flaming hair snapped and her hips switched. There were some, coming from the offices at greensedge, who would have spoken to her. But they saw her eyes, they saw Zack, and they stared. Zack began to wish he had not come.

Soon he knew she knew he followed. A tightening of muscles warned him she was about to turn.

She pierced him with bitter eyes.

He gazed at her, stupidly.

She jerked and plunged ahead.

He followed, beginning to be miserable.

She jerked again, glowered. "Well?"

He gazed, stupidly, then low-

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ered his eyes and slunk away. He plunged his hands into his pockets, dejected.

He heard his name behind him. He turned and had a glimpse of angered male face before a fist caught his nose and toppled him to the grass.

His face was pain; he wanted to rock it in his hands. But people were watching, straight and handsome people. He stood, straightened his nose roughly, and plodded away. He remembered the months when he had been straight and handsome too, but that didn't help.

When she left her office that afternoon he followed again, setting his feet down as she did, switching his thick hips, carrying his head defiantly.

She whirled, face afire. "Quit this foolishness!"

Deliberately he made an obscene gesture.

Her hand flew to his jaw, reddening his flesh, and she whirled away. He didn't follow until he saw her hair flame above the clearing.

Then, because he had a special lifter pack, he waited at her apartment block door when she came plunging across the green. The door dissolved and he shoved past her.

She tried to push past him. He blocked her, slouched across the lobby thwarting her. Then, seeing the elevator door slowly materialize, he sprinted. He hit the solidifier and the door materialized in her face: She shimmered with fury as the elevator lifted him.

He disembarked at the top floor and took the service conveyor to the clearing. Minutes later he lifted down at Headquarters green and ran for Complaints. Mix stood at the receiver bench, a big, doubtful man who wore no fault.

The flame-haired woman's face appeared on one of the receivers and Mix dialed his sender. "Mix, Complaints."

"A man has been harassing me. I want you to stop it."

Mix motioned to Zack. "Let my assistant take down the facts."

Zack shoved his scarred face too close to the sender. "Yeah?"

She gasped and scrambled her dials, distorting before disappearing.

Zack waited, punching reports. Then her face reappeared. Mix took the call.

"You must listen," she said. "It's foolishness. I don't need him."

"We got a report," Mix said.

She sighed. "If my counselor filed me, he was mistaken. I'm only a twice-monthly—he's hardly in a position to judge."

"Mistaken?" Mix frowned.

She twitched her lips. "I am capable of managing my affairs without interference.

Patiently he said, "When we get a report—"

"I don't need him. I have everything under control."

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Mix looked doubtful.

"I'm neither irresponsible nor adolescent. I'm twenty-seven years old and I supervise twenty-two people every day. I demand you let me decide what I need, and whom."

"If you want to insist—"

"I do!"

"—then I've got to take him off."

"Do it then!" She distorted, then disappeared.

Mix scrambled his own dials and nodded to Zack.

Minutes later Zack was in the air. The city glistened beneath him, green meadows bounded by low gleaming structures. Once, tired of being ugly and misshapen, he had turned in his faults, had had his body processed and had taken a regular job. It had been an interesting job of course, carefully adapted to his individual needs. But it had taken only four hours of his day. The other hours he had spent doing the things people did, taking classes, doing volunteer work, good things, interesting things. But soon he was looking at people and seeing only creases, frowns, tightnesses. Finally, stoically, he had resumed his scar, determined to accept stares and ugliness. But still he had doubts. Was he doing the right thing? Or was he meddling?

He set down at her green, slouched into the lobby of her building and entered the public booth. He dialed her number. When she dialed herself on, he simply shoved his face into the sender and stared, empty-eyed.

She dialed off the visual from her end. "Get off!" she hissed. "He took you off my case."

He stared into the sender.

"Get off! I don't need you."

He continued to stare.

"I'm going to call your superior."

He stared. He heard her quick breathing.

She dialed her set off, then tried to dial out. She realized when she saw him that she could not break the circuit from her end. She scalded him with words. He had to tighten his jaws not to flinch.

Finally he stood and left the booth, leaving the set on. She could have his call traced when she thought of it, could come down and terminate it herself.

When she left the clearing the next morning she was grim on the arm of a small, precise-featured man whose name, Zack knew, was Cordon Gaines. She pointed when she saw Zack leaning against a tree, hands in pockets. She propelled Gaines toward him. "That's him."

"You," Gaines commanded.

Zack deigned to look at him.

"You've been harassing her?"

Zack flicked his eyes to her.

The man snapped his head impatiently.

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"Hell," Zack said disinterestedly.

"You know that if you are annoying her without authority you can be placed under physical restraint."

"Hell."

Gaines turned to her. "He's still under orders," he said scornfully.

"But his superior told me—"

"Don't believe it." He glanced impatiently at his watch. "I have to get to work." He was already easing away from her. "Ignore him. There's nothing else you can do."

"But you were going to help me," she insisted.

"There's nothing I can do," he said. "Don't make me late, dear."

She stepped hesitantly away, imploring with unhappy eyes.

"Dear," he said with clipped patience.

She bobbed her head humbly and started toward greens-edge.

Zack slouched after her.

She turned, saw him, began to walk faster.

Zack walked faster.

She ran.

He ran.

She reached the offices and flung herself against the door, which dissolved slowly. She looked fearfully back. But Zack had stepped behind a tree. She scanned the green. She was frowning when the elevator lifted her.

Zack lifted back to Headquarters green and worked with Mix until late afternoon. Then he went to his apartment and packed his clothing, toilet articles, spare faults and half a dozen books.

Her door was solid to all but her. But he brandished his nullifier and stepped inside. She had three pale rooms, and he knew her flaming hair would bring them alive. He found and flipped the switch that materialized the furniture.

He swept her clothing from her closets and dumped it on the couch. He dumped shoes and cosmetics atop clothing and emptied the contents of her storage drawers onto the dining counter. Then he arranged his own clothing, shoes, faults in their place.

He ordered food. When it came he took it to the bedroom and lay on the bed with a book. He got up once, and when he lay back dishes overturned, staining the spread with beet juice and coffee. When he had finished eating he stacked the dishes on the floor, turned over and thought about nothing until he was asleep.

He awoke to her shaking his shoulder. Her hair fell in disorderly flames over her eyes. "It isn't fair," she insisted. "Why are you persecuting me?"

He shrugged his shoulder from her grasp. He leaned over the edge of the bed. He put the dishes into her hands. "Wanta put these on the conveyor for me?"

Her hair flew back from her

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face. She slammed the dishes to the floor, and they made bouncing chaos. "Put your own dishes on the conveyor."

"Your dishes," he said disinterestedly.

She hurtled from the room. He heard the clicking of dials and went to the doorway.

Mix's doubtful face appeared on her receiver. "You promised to relieve him and he's here in my apartment sleeping in my bed and eating my food." Her words flamed angrily until she sagged against the sender. "Please," she begged.

Mix looked ponderous and concerned. "I relieved him right after you called, lady."

"Then tell him!" She seized Zack's arm, pulling him into range.

"Can you prove he's the man you complained about?"

"I saw him! You said he was your assistant."

Mix shook his ponderous head. "He *looks* like my man."

"Well?" she demanded.

"You've got to see my position. I can't make positive identification over a viewer. You've got to bring him in."

"Bring him in!" She shoved Zack's face into her sender. "Just order him to leave me alone!"

"How can I order him if he isn't my man?"

"He *is* your man. Aren't you?"

"Are you?" Mix said.

"Hell," Zack said.

Mix shook his head. "He's no man of mine. My men don't swear when addressing a superior officer."

"But he's moved into my apartment!" she cried. "He's sleeping in my bed. He's thrown my things out of my closets and put his in. You've got to do something."

He sighed. "It's not our place to handle private offenders."

She glared and spun the dials. Her flame of hair leapt as she stomped to the door. "I'm going to bring the house manager."

She returned with an oily round little man. "That's him, he's in my bed again," she crowed.

The manager approached Zack apprehensively. "Sir, the young lady . . ." he said delicately.

Zack stretched and yawned. "No sleeping around this place," he growled.

"Sir, if you will . . ."

"Women!" Zack flung himself off the bed. "Invite you in, then won't let you have five minutes peace."

"I didn't!" she cried. "He was here when I came. He broke in."

But on the way down Zack showed the little man his identity card and badge. Then he took the elevator back up.

When he nullified the door she threw her weight against him. He shoved her across the room before himself, and she flopped into a chair and glared.

He searched her cabinets until he found several bottles. He poured

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himself a drink. Then he went to the bedroom, wadded the stained spread and threw it against the wall. He pulled the covers to his chest and opened a book.

She had followed. She dropped ungracefully to the foot of the bed. "I know I'm right. No matter what my counselor says. Birk is unstable and silly and excitable. Whereas Cordon is decisive, strong and disciplined. I supervise twenty-two people at work every day, and I will not marry a fool."

Zack thrust his feet deeper into the covers and nudged her from the bed.

She didn't notice she sat on the floor. Her voice rose and fell and finally she crawled to the side of the bed and tried to tell Zack she had everything under control "Can't you see, I would be miserable with Birk because he is excitable and he giggles and I can't stand silly men. I have to have a man who is stable, like me." She was sobbing, and her hair fell over her cheeks, wet. "Can't you see?"

Zack slapped his book shut. "Lady, I can't listen to this crap all night."

She leapt to her feet and the hair leapt from her face. "You!" She seized at the table where his drink stood and hurled drink and glass at him. She spun around the room, seizing, hurling, reviling.

Zack burrowed under the covers and covered his head with his arms. Sometimes he wondered if people shouldn't be permitted to make their mistakes. But every Trouble Agent committed to memory that part of the manual which read, "Unconsciously the potentially disturbed citizen examines the world about him and finds it orderly and logical. He then turns a critical eye upon himself and finds over-emotionalism, illogic, imperfection of thought process. He therefore turns upon himself with unconscious scorn which manifests itself in foolish and harmful decisions and attitudes. It is the function of the Trouble Agent to draw the pent-up fury of the potentially disturbed citizen upon his own head. Then, freed of his unconscious burden, the citizen is enabled to resume a normal life, subject of course to frequent re-evaluation."

Or, stated less formally: mankind, through the development of science and technology, had perfected the external world beyond the endurance of its weaker members.

So Zack cowered and let her rage. After a while she ceased bombardment. He sat up.

"Awrrr!" she cried, hurtling out of the room.

He leaned against the doorframe as she dialed Mix. Mix was very sorry but he could not help her. Zack sank into a chair as she dialed the house manager. He too was very sorry, and she screamed and called him names.

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She stared at the empty screen, then went to the cabinet and opened a bottle and tilted back her head. She drank until she choked, spilling liquor down her dress. She dialed again.

Cordon Gaines' face sprang to her receiver and before he could speak she poured her troubles to him, telling him of Zack's behavior, repeating every imprecation she had hurled at the manager.

Gaines was calm, reasonable, rational. "You must be calm," he said. "This is how they operate. You can do nothing but—"

She gaped and rampaged through a second recital of her complaints and her opinion of everyone involved. Then because he looked pained at her language, she spat at him. He was shocked and intimated, stiffly, that she was not behaving like a lady.

"A lady!" she screeched. "All this happening and no one will help, and I'm supposed to behave like a lady?"

He twitched his thin lips in disapproval. "A lady, if she is a lady, will remain a lady in all circumstances," he said. He even intimated, overriding her rising shriek, that Zack knew his job and would not be with her if she did not require his help.

Then her voice rose over his. When it fell and he admonished again that she must conduct herself like a lady, she scrambled her dials and he disappeared.

She sobbed. Then, her hair in tatters, her eyes swollen, she took the bottle and tilted it back and drank again.

Zack swung his legs across the arm of the chair. "How about a crack at the bottle?"

She motioned to throw it at him. Then she said, "Very well, we shall be very civilized." She found two glasses and filled them brimming. "Didn't you ever have troubles?" she asked.

"Sure. I had troubles."

"So tell me. What happened?"

He shrugged. "Nothing," he said. "I took care of them myself."

"But I supervise twenty-two people every day. Why won't you let me take care of my troubles myself?"

He shook his head. He should have taken an anti-intoxication capsule but it was too late now and he was uncomfortably sober anyway. He winced as she stumbled and caught herself. What if she fell on the bottle and cut her throat? How did he know she wouldn't? What right did he have to meddle in her affairs?

"Why're we staying here?" she said querulously. "Let's go out and have a party. I feel like a party."

"I've gotta get to bed soon."

"But where am I going to sleep?"

"On the couch."

"But it's my apartment."

"I'm your guest. Guests sleep in beds."

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She frowned. Finally she said, "What would you do if you were me and I was you?"

"I'd call someone and have him get rid of me."

"It didn't work."

"Then I guess I'd get drunk," he said.

She laughed and he laughed too. "You're all right," she said. "I have got to have a party so all my friends can meet you."

"It's late. I gotta get some sleep."

"Aw. You like parties."

He grunted.

She went to the sender and began dialing. She called the house manager but he was tactful, firm and regretful. She called friends and people who worked with her but they too were tactful, firm and regretful, probably because Zack had moved to share the screen with her.

She called Cordon Gaines and he appeared with his face set for apologies. When she said he must come right over, they were having a party, his lips tightened. "Go drink several cups of black coffee and put your head under the shower. Call me back when you're sober."

"I don't want to be sober," she protested. "You're being stuffy."

"If it's stuffy not to want your fiancee calling drunk and dishevelled with a strange man peering over her shoulder, then I am stuffy and I intend to remain stuffy."

She glared and began describing his various undesirable characteristics in cutting detail. He became very white and finally scrambled his dials, and she scrambled her own.

She stalked the floor and jabbed the air with her fingernails as she listed for Zack all the reasons she could not tolerate Cordon Gaines. Then finally she said, "We'll call Birk and Birk will come because Birk's a good guy even if I wouldn't consent to marry him.'

Zack nodded, taking his chair again.

She dialed Birk's number and wailed his name, giggling.

He appeared on the screen, a bearlike young man with a handsome glib face and black hair. "Hey!" His shoulders heaved. A giggle shook from his hero's face. "Looka you."

"We're having a party and you are late, Birk Van Bibber."

"You're drunk, kid." His shoulders shook.

"How could we have a party if I'm not?'

He giggled. His shoulders trembled and shook. Then he scrambled off.

He was grinning and gleeful when she dissolved the door for him. Then he saw Zack. "Who he?"

She plunked a brimming glass into his hand and he drank, momentarily diverted. He snickered when some of the drink ran down

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his chin. "Who dat man?"

She puckered. "He's my guest."

"Didn't know you had a guest." He beamed over Zack's hand.

"He's been my guest all day. He's been following me and pestering me and I tried to get him to go away but he wouldn't." She pursed her lips and launched into the whole story, working herself into a temper. "It isn't fair. Because I've already decided not to marry Cordon. I decided without him doing anything, and he's slept in my bed and ruined my bedspread and he's drinking too much. How can we have a party if he drinks it all?"

Birk had been tittering and giggling. She turned on him. "What are you giggling about?"

"It's funny.'

"It is not funny. It's all his fault. He made me decide to marry Cordon and he caused it all and he's been making me drink too much so now I'm drunk but I'm not going to stand by and let him ruin your life too. Making trouble, getting people mixed up and drunk and making them marry the wrong man." She slammed her drink down, splashing the floor and herself. "Throw him out! I don't want to look at him! I hate him!"

Birk clouded, ferocious and bearlike. "I'll do that." But he couldn't suppress the silent giggling that shook his shoulders. He pulled Zack out of the chair.

She surrounded the bottle with both arms, glaring. "You're not getting Birk's bottle!" she cried.

Her voice followed them out, mourning the shambles Zack had almost made of Birk's life. Birk giggled happily. When they reached the lobby he escorted Zack to the door and put him out with a playful shove. "That's for trying to ruin my whole life, buddy."

Zack shook his head, straightened his suit and walked unsteadily across the green. Soon the cool air steadied him.

He was approaching the lifter clearing when a strident voice cried, "You!" A brisk little woman slammed her purse across his face and reviled him scorchingly before trotting self-righteously away.

He got up and rubbed his nose back into shape and looked after her, and he felt good. When he had first seen her she had been dying lingeringly and horribly from a disease no doctor could diagnose. Now she was obviously healthy.

He hardly noticed the throbbing of his face as he strapped on his pack and lifted off. It was one of those good nights, when a case had terminated favorably, when a former subject had slugged him and meant it. He hated to go to his apartment and take off his scar.

So he hovered for a while, watching the city glow and shimmer. Then he lifted down at Headquarters green and headed back to Assignments. ◀

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Introduction to Richard McKenna's HUNTER, COME HOME

Some years ago the Staff of The Magazine received one of those shocks—rare and pleasurable—which comes from finding a treasure among the unsolicited MSS pouring in like the lavas which restlessly roll—the treasure in this case being entitled CASEY AGONISTES (F&SF, Sept., 1958), by Richard McKenna. Before your present editor saw the story in print he met Mac himself at the Milford (Pa.) Science Fiction Writers Conference—an experience fortunately often repeated, there and elsewhere. Richard McKenna is an Old Navy and an Old China Hand, a raconteur extraordinary, with eyebrows (red) bigger than most moustachioes, a gentleman, a scholar, and the husband of the gentle Eva. He writes briefly of himself now: "Born 9 May 1913 in Mountain Home, Idaho. Enlisted Navy 1931. First ten years in China. Retired as MMC in 1953 and came to Chapel Hill to attend UNC. Graduated 1956 with B.A. in Eng. Lit. Married day after I finished my last exam and began postgraduate work on how to live with female of species. Began writing 1957. This story written 1958, much worked on since. Have just finished China novel, THE SAND PEBBLES, for Harper's." The "China novel" has subsequently (a) won the Harper's Prize, (b) been selected for serialization in The Saturday Evening Post, *(c) chosen by the Book of the Month Club, and (d) purchased for the movies! Coincidental note: While serving aboard the Asiatic transport* USS Gold Star, *McKenna first had his attention seriously drawn to literature by the late Commander Cecil Faine, father of Djinn Faine (DAUGHTER OF EVE, F&SF, June, 1962) . . . Mr. McKenna here gives us a story of epic quality—a conflict of cultures comparable to that of Athens and Sparta, a struggle between men and men and between men and a life-form previously unknown to men, a struggle between one man and his own culture; and of one woman who—but we*

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have said enough. "Home is the sailor/ Home from the sea/ And the hunter home from the hill," wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, in his own epitaph. It is not always Death, however, which beareth away the victory.

HUNTER, COME HOME

By Richard McKenna

ON THAT PLANET THE DAMNED trees were immortal, the new guys said in disgust, so there was no wood for campfires and they had to burn pyrolene doused on raw stem fragments. Roy Craig crouched over the fire tending a bubbling venison stew and caught himself wishing they might still use the electric galley inside their flyer. But the new guys were all red dots and they wanted flame in the open and of course they were right.

Four of them sat across the fire from Craig, talking loudly and loading explosive pellets. They wore blue field denims and had roached hair and a red dot tattooed on their foreheads. Bork Wilde, the new field chief, stood watching them. He was tall and bold featured, with roached black hair, and he had two red dots on his forehead. Craig's reddish hair was unroached and except for freckles his forehead was blank, because he had never taken the Mordin manhood test. For all his gangling young six-foot body, he felt like a boy among men. As the only blanky in a crew of red dots, he caught all the menial jobs now. It was not pleasant.

They were a six-man ringwalling crew and they were camped beside their flyer, a gray, high sided cargo job, a safe two miles downslope from a big ringwall. All around them the bare, fluted, silvery stems speared and branched fifty feet overhead and gave a watery cast to the twilight. Normally the stems and twigs would be covered with two-lobed phytozoon leaves of all sizes and color patterns. The men and their fire had excited the leaves and they had detached themselves, to hover in a pulsating rainbow cloud high

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enough to catch the sun above the silver tracery of the upper branches. They piped and twittered and shed a spicy perfume. Certain daring ones dipped low above the men. One of the pellet loaders, a little rat faced man named Cobb, hurled a flaming chunk up through them.

"Shut up, you flitterbugs!" he roared. "Let a man hear himself think!"

"Can you really think, Cobbo?" Whelan asked.

"If I think I think, then I'm thinking, ain't I?"

The men laughed. The red and white fibrous root tangle underfoot was slowly withdrawing, underground and to the sides, leaving bare soil around the fire. The new guys thought it was to escape the fire, but Craig remembered the roots had always done that when the old ringwall crew used to camp without fire. By morning the whole area around the flyer would be bare soil. A brown, many-legged crawler an inch long pushed out of the exposed soil and scuttled after the retreating roots. Craig smiled at it and stirred the stew. A small green and red phyto leaf dropped from the cloud and settled on his knobby wrist. He let it nuzzle at him. Its thin, velvety wings waved slowly. A much thickened midrib made it a kind of body with no head or visible appendages. Craig turned his wrist over and wondered idly why the phyto did not fall off. It was a pretty little thing.

A patterened green and gold phyto with wings as large as dinnerplates settled on Wilde's shoulder. Wilde snatched it and tore its wings with thick fingers. It whimpered and fluttered. Craig winced.

"Stop it!" he said involuntarily and then, apologetically, "It can't hurt you, Mr. Wilde. It was just curious."

"Who pulled your trigger, Blanky?" Wilde asked lazily. "I wish these damned bloodsucking butterflies *could* know what I'm doing here."

He turned and kicked one of the weak, turgor-rigid stems and brought it crumpling down across the flyer. He threw the torn phyto after it and laughed, showing big horse teeth. Craig bit his lip.

"Chow's ready," he said. "Come and get it."

After cleanup it got dark, with only one moon in the sky, and the phytos furled their wings and went to sleep on the upper branches. The fire died away. The men rolled up in blankets and snored. Craig sat there. He saw Sidis come and stand looking out the doorway of the lighted main cabin. Sidis was the Belconti ecologist who had been boss of the old ringwall crew. He was along on this first trip with the new men only to break Wilde in as crew chief. He insisted on eating and sleeping inside the flyer, to the scorn of the

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Planet Mordin red dots. His forehead was blank as Craig's, but that was little comfort. Sidis was from Planet Belconti, where they had different customs.

For Mordinmen, courage was the supreme good. They were descendants of a lost Earth-colony that had lapsed to a stone age technology and fought its way back to gunpowder in ceaseless war against the fearsome Great Russel dinotheres who were the dominant life-form on Planet Mordin before men came and for a long time after. For many generations young candidates for manhood went forth in a sworn band to kill a Great Russel with spears and arrows. When rifles came, they hunted him singly. The survivors wore the red dot of manhood and fathered the next generation. Then the civilized planets rediscovered Mordin. Knowledge flowed in. Population exploded. Suddenly there were not enough Great Russels left alive to meet the need. Craig's family had not been able to buy him a Great Russel hunt and he could not become a man.

I'll have my chance yet, Craig thought dourly.

Ten years before Craig's birth the Mordin Hunt Council found the phyto planet unclaimed and set out to convert it to one great dinothere hunting range. The Earth-type Mordin biota could neither eat nor displace the alien phytos. Mordin contracted with Belconti biologists to exterminate the native life, Mordin laborers served under Belconti biotechs. All were blankies; no red dots would serve under the effete Belcontis, many of whom were women. Using the killer plant *Thanasis,* the Belcontis cleared two large islands and restocked them with a Mordin biota. One they named Base Island and made their headquarters. On the other they installed a Great Russel dinothere. He flourished.

When I was little, they told me I'd kill my Great Russel on this planet, Craig thought. He clasped his arms around his knees. There was still only the one Great Russel on the whole planet.

Because for thirty years the continents refused to die. The phytos encysted *Thanasis* areas, adapted, recovered ground. Belconti genesmiths designed ever more deadly strains of *Thanasis,* pushing it to the safe upper limit of its recombination index. After decades of dubious battle *Thanasis* began clearly losing ground. The Belcontis said the attempt must be given up. But the phyto planet had become the symbol of future hope to curb present social unrest on Mordin. The Hunt Council would not give up the fight. Mordin red dots were sent to study biotechnics on Belconti. Then they came to the phyto planet to do the job themselves.

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Craig was already there, finishing out a two-year labor contract. Working with other blankies under a Belconti boss, he had almost forgotten the pain of withheld manhood. He had extended his contract for two more years. Then, a month ago, the red dots had come in the Mordin relief ship, to relieve both Belconti biotechs and the Mordin field crews. The Belcontis would go home on their own relief ship in about a year. Craig was left the only blanky on the planet, except for the Belcontis, and they didn't count.

I'm already alone, he thought. He bowed his head on his knees and wished he could sleep. Someone touched his shoulder. He looked up to see Sidis beside him.

"Come inside, will you, Roy?" Sidis whispered. "I want to talk to you."

Craig sat down across from Sidis at the long table in the main cabin. Sidis was a slender, dark man with the gentle Belconti manners and a wry smile.

"I'm worried what you'll do these next two years," he said. "I don't like the way they order you around, that nasty little Cobb in particular. Why do you take it?"

"I have to because I'm a blanky."

"You can't help that. If it's one of your laws, it's not a fair law."

"It's fair because it's natural," Criag said. "I don't like not being a man, but that's just how it is."

"You are a man. You're twenty-four years old."

"I'm not a man until I feel like one," Craig said. "I can't feel like one until I kill my Great Russel."

"I'm afraid you'd still feel out of place," Sidis said. "I've watched you for two years and I think you have a certain quality your own planet has no use for. So I have a proposition." He glanced at the door, then back to Craig. "Declare yourself a Belconti citizen, Roy. We'll all sponsor you. I know Mil Ames will find you a job on the staff. You can go home to Belcontis with us."

"Great Russel!" Craig said. "I couldn't never do that, Mr. Sidis."

"Why couldn't you? Do you want to go through life as Mordin blanky? Would you ever get a wife?"

"Maybe. Some woman the red dots passed over. She'd hate me, for her bad luck."

"And you call that fair?"

"It's fair because it's natural. It's natural for a woman to want an all-the-way man instead of a boy that just grew up."

"Not for Belconti women. How about it, Roy?"

Craig clasped his hands between his knees. He lowered his head and shook it slowly.

"No. No. I couldn't. My place is, here, fighting for a time when no kid has to grow up cheated, like I been." He raised his head.

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"Besides, no Mordinman ever runs away from a fight."

Sidis smiled. "This fight is already lost."

"Not the way Mr. Wilde talks. In the labs at Base Camp they're going to use a trans-something, I hear."

"Translocator in the gene matrix," Sidis said. His face shadowed. "I guarantee they won't do it while Mil Ames runs the labs. After we go, they'll probably kill themselves in a year." He looked sharply at Craig. "I hadn't meant to tell you that, but it's one reason I hope you'll leave with us."

"How kill ourselves?"

"With an outlaw free-system."

Craig shook his head. Sidis looked thoughtful.

"Look, you know how the phyto stems are all rooted together underground like one huge plant," he said. "*Thanasis* pumps self-duplicating enzyme systems into them, trying to predigest the whole continent. In the labs we design those free-systems. They can digest a man, too, and that's what you get inoculated against each time we design a new one. We also design a specific control virus able to kill off each new strain of *Thanasis*. Well, then." He steepled his fingers. "With translocation, *Thanasis* can redesign its own free-systems in the field, you might say. It could come up with something impossible to immunize, something no control virus we know how to make could handle. Then it would kill us and rule the planet itself."

"That's what happened on Planet Froy, isn't it?"

"Yes. That's what you risk. And you can't win. So come to Belconti with us."

Craig stood up. "I almost wish you didn't tell me that, about the danger," he said. "Now I can't think about leaving."

Sidis leaned back and spread his fingers on the table. "Talk to Midori Blake before you say no for sure," he said. "I know she's fond of you, Roy. I thought you rather liked her."

"I do like to be around her," Craig said. "I liked it when you used to go there, 'stead of camping in the field. I wish we did now."

"I'll try to persuade Wilde. Think it over, will you?"

"I can't think," Craig said. "I don't know what I feel." He turned to the door. "I'm going out and walk and try to think."

"Goodnight, Roy." Sidis reached for a book.

The second moon was just rising. Craig walked through a jungle of ghostly silver stems. Phytos clinging to them piped sleepily, disturbed by his passage. I'm too ignorant to be a Belconti, he thought. He was nearing the ringwall. Stems grew more thickly, became harder, fused at last into a sloping, ninety-foot dam. Craig

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climbed halfway up and stopped. It was foolhardy to go higher without a protective suit. *Thanasis* was on the other side. Its free-systems diffused hundreds of feet, even in still air. The phyto stems were all rooted together like one big plant and *Thanasis* ate into it like a sickness. The stems formed ringwalls around stands of *Thanasis*, to stop its spread and force it to poison itself. Craig climbed a few feet higher.

Sure I'm big enough to whip Cobb, he thought. Whip any of them, except Mr. Wilde. But he knew that in a quarrel his knees would turn to water and his voice squeak off to nothing, because they were men and he was not.

"Just the same, I'm not a coward," he said aloud.

He climbed to the top. *Thanasis* stretched off in a sea of blackness beneath the moons. Just below he could see the outline of narrow, pointed leaves furred with stinging hairs and beaded with poison meant to be rainwashed into the roots of downslope prey. The ringwall impounded the poisoned water. This stand of *Thanasis* was drowning in it and it was desperate. He saw the tendrils groping the flinty ringwall surface, hungry to release free-systems into enemy tissue and follow after to suck and absorb. They felt his warmth and waved feebly at him. This below him was the woody, climbing form. They said even waist-high shrubs could eat a man in a week.

I'm not afraid, Craig thought. He sat down and took off his boots and let his bare feet dangle above the *Thanasis*. Midori Blake and all the Belcontis would think this was crazy. They didn't understand about courage—all they had was brains. He liked them anyway, Midori most of all. He thought about her as he gazed off across the dark *Thanasis*. The whole continent would have to be like that, first. Then they'd kill off *Thanasis* with a control virus and plant grass and real trees and bring birds and animals and it would all be like Base and Russel Islands were now. Sidis was wrong. That trans-stuff would do it. He'd stay and help and earn the rest of the money he needed. He felt better, with his mind made up. Then he felt a gentle tug at his left ankle.

Fierce, sudden pain stabbed his ankle. He jerked his leg up. The tendril broke and came with it, still squirming and stinging. Craig whistled and swore as he scraped it off with a boot heel, careful not to let it touch his hands. Then he pulled on his right boot and hurried back to camp for treatment.

He carried his left boot, because he knew how fast his ankle would swell. He reached camp with his left leg one screaming ache. Sidis was still up. He neutralized the poison, gave Craig a sedative and made him turn into

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one of the bunks inside the flyer. He did not ask questions. He looked down at Craig with his wry smile.

"You Mordinmen," he said, and shook his head.

The Belcontis were always saying that.

In the morning Cobb sneered and Wilde was furious.

"If you're shooting for a week on the sick list, aim again," Wilde said. "I'll give you two days."

"He needs two weeks," Sidis said. "I'll do his work."

"I'll work," Craig said. "It don't hurt so much I can't work."

"Take today off," Wilde said, mollified.

"I'll work today," Craig said. "I'm all right."

It was a tortured day under the hot yellow sun, with his foot wrapped in sacks and stabbing pain up his spine with every step. Craig drove his power auger deep into basal ringwall tissue and the aromatic, red-purple sap gushed out and soaked his feet. Then he pushed in the explosive pellet, shouldered his rig and paced off the next position. Over and over he did it, like a machine, not stopping to eat his lunch, ignoring the phytos that clung to his neck and hands. He meant to finish his arc before the others, if it killed him. But when he finished and had time to think about it, his foot felt better than it had all day. He snapped a red cloth to his auger shaft and waved it high and the flyer slanted down to pick him up. Sidis was at the controls.

"You're the first to finish," he said. "I don't see why you're even alive. Go and lie down now."

"I'll take the controls," Craig said. "I feel good."

"I guess you're proving something," Sidis smiled. "All right."

He gave Craig the controls and went aft. Driving the flyer was one of the menial jobs that Craig liked. He liked being alone in the little control cabin, with its two seats and windows all around. He lifted to a thousand feet and glanced along the ringwall, curving out of sight in both directions. The pent sea of *Thanasis* was dark green by daylight. The phyto area outside the ringwall gleamed silvery, with an overplay of shifting colors, and it was very beautiful. Far and high in the north he saw a colored cloud among the fleecy ones. It was a mass of migratory phytos drifting in the wind. It was beautiful too.

"They're very fast at transferring substance to grow or repair the ringwalls," he heard Sidis telling Wilde back in the main cabin. "You'll notice the biomass downslope is less dense. When you release that poisoned water from inside the ringwall you get a shock effect and *Thanasis* follows up fast. But a new ringwall always forms."

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"Next time through I'll blow fifty-mile arcs," Wilde said.

Craig slanted down to pick up Jordan. He was a stocky, sandy-haired man about Craig's age. He scrambled aboard grinning.

"Beat us again, hey, Craig?" he said. "That took guts, boy! You're all right!"

"I got two years practise on you guys," Craig said.

The praise made him feel good. It was the first time Jordan had called him by name instead of "Blanky." He lifted the flyer again. Jordan sat down in the spare seat.

"How's the foot?" he asked.

"Pretty good. I might get my boot on, unlaced," Craig said.

"Don't try. I'll take camp chores tonight," Jordan said. "You rest that foot, Craig."

"There's Whelan signaling," Craig said.

He felt himself blushing with pleasure as he slanted down to pick up Whelan. Jordan went aft. When Rice and Cobb had been picked up, Craig hovered the flyer at two miles and Wilde pulsed off the explosive. Twenty miles of living ringwall tissue fountained in dust and flame. Phytos rising in terrified, chromatic clouds marked the rolling shock wave. Behind it the silvery plain darkened with the sheet flow of poisoned water.

"Hah! Go it, *Thanasis!*" Wilde shouted. "I swear to bullets, that's a pretty sight down there!" He sighed. "Well, that makes it a day, men. Sidis, where's a good place to camp?"

"We're only an hour from Burton Island," Sidis said. "I used to stop at the taxonomy station there every night, when we worked this area."

"Probably why you never got anywhere, too," Wilde said. "But I want a look at that island. The Huntsman's got plans for it."

He shouted orders up to Craig. Craig lifted to ten miles and headed southeast at full throttle. A purplish sea rolled above the silvery horizon. Far on the sea rim beaded islands climbed to view. It had been a good day, Craig thought. Jordan seemed to want to be friends. And now at long last he was going to see Midori Blake again.

He grounded the flyer on slagged earth near the familiar gray stone buildings on the eastern headland. The men got out and George and Helen Toyama, smiling and gray-haired in lab smocks, came to welcome them. Craig's left boot was tight and it hurt, but he could wear it unlaced. Helen told him Midori was painting in the gorge. He limped down the gorge path, past Midori's small house and the Toyama home on the cliff edge at left. Midori and the Toyamas were the only people on Burton Island. The island was a phyto research sanctuary and it had never been touched by *Thana-*

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sis. It was the only place other than Base Camp where humans lived permanently.

The gorge was Midori's special place. She painted it over and over, never satisfied. Craig knew it well, the quartz ledge, the cascading waterfall and pool, the phytos dancing in sunlight that the silvery stem forest changed to the quality of strong moonlight. Midori said it was the peculiar light that she could never capture. Craig liked watching her paint, most of all when she forgot him and sang to herself. She was clean and apart and beautiful and it was just good to be in the same world with her. Through the plash of the waterfall and the phyto piping Craig heard her singing before he came upon her, standing before her easel beside a quartz boulder. She heard him and turned and smiled warmly.

"Roy! I'm so glad to see you!" she said. "I was afraid you'd gone home after all."

She was small and dainty under her gray dress, with large black eyes and delicate features. Her dark hair snugged boyishly close to her head. Her voice had a natural, birdlike quality and she moved and gestured with the quick grace of a singing bird. Craig grinned happily.

"For a while I almost wished I did," he said. "Now I'm glad again I didn't." He limped toward her.

"Your foot!" she said. "Come over here and sit down." She tugged him to a seat on the boulder. "What happened?"

"Touch of *Thanasis*. It's nothing much."

"Take off your boot! You don't want pressure on it!"

She helped him take the boot off and ran cool fingertips over the red, swollen ankle. Then she sat beside him.

"I know it hurts you. How did it happen?"

"I was kind of unhappy," he said. "I went and sat on a ringwall and let my bare feet hang over."

"Foolish Roy. Why were you unhappy?"

"Oh . . . things." Several brilliant phytos settled on his bare ankle. He let them stay. "We got to sleep in the field now, 'stead of coming here. The new guys are all red dots. I'm just a nothing again and—"

"You mean they think they're better than you?"

"They are better, and that's what hurts. Killing a Great Russel is a kind of spirit thing, Midori." He scuffed his right foot. "I'll see the day when this planet has enough Great Russels so no kid has to grow up cheated."

"The phytos are not going to die," she said softly. "It's very clear now. We're defeated."

"You Belcontis are. Mordinmen never give up."

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"*Thanasis* is defeated. Will you shoot phytos with rifles?"

"Please don't joke about rifles. We're going to use trans-something on *Thanasis.*"

"Translocation? Oh, no!" She raised her fingers to her lips. "It can't be controlled for field use," she said. "They wouldn't dare!"

"Mordinmen dare anything," he said proudly. "These guys all studied on Belconti, they know how. That's another thing. . . ."

He scuffed his foot again. Phytos were on both their heads and shoulders now and all over his bared ankle. They twittered faintly.

"What, Roy?"

"They make me feel ignorant. Here I been ringwalling for two years, and they already know more about phytos than I do. I want you to tell me something about phytos that I can use to make the guys notice me. Like, can phytos feel?"

She held her hand to her cheek, silent for a moment.

"Phytos are strange and wonderful and I love them," she said softly. "They're mixed plant and animal. Life never split itself apart on this planet."

The flying phytozoons, she explained, functioned as leaves for the vegetative stems. But the stems, too, had internal temperature control. The continental network of great conduit roots moved fluids anywhere in any quanity with valved peristalsis. A stem plus attached phytos made a kind of organism.

"But any phyto, Roy, can live with any stem, and they're forever shifting. Everything is part of everything," she said. "Our job here on Burton Island is to classify the phytos, and we just can't do it! They vary continuously along every dimension we choose, physical or chemical, and *kind* simply has no meaning." She sighed. "That's the most wonderful thing I know about them. Will that help you?"

"I don't get all that. That's what I mean, I'm ignorant," he said. "Tell me some one simple thing I can use to make the guys take notice of me."

"All right, tell them this," she said. "Phyto color patterns are plastid systems that synthesize different molecules. The way they can recombine parts to form new organisms, without waiting for evolution, gives them a humanly inconceivable biochemical range. Whatever new poison or free-system we design for *Thanasis,* somewhere by sheer chance they hit on a counter-substance. The knowledge spreads faster each time. That's why *Thanasis* is defeated."

"No! Don't keep saying that, Midori!" Craig protested. "This here translocation, now—"

"Not even that!" Her voice was sharp. "The phytos have unlimited translocation and any num-

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ber of sexes. Collectively, I don't doubt they're the mightiest biochemical lab in the galaxy. They form a kind of biochemical intelligence, almost a mind, and it's learning faster than we are." She shook his arm with both her small hands. "Yes, tell them, make them understand," she said. "Human intelligence is defeated here. Now you will try human ferocity . . . oh, Roy. . . ."

"Say it," he said bitterly. "You Belcontis think all Mordinmen are stupid. You sound almost like you want us to lose."

She turned away and began cleaning her brushes. It was nearly dark and the phytos were going to rest on the stems overhead. Craig sat miserably silent, remembering the feel of her hands on his arm. Then she spoke. Her voice was soft again.

"I don't know. If you wanted homes and farms here . . . but you want only the ritual deaths of man and dinothere. . . ."

"Maybe people's souls get put together different ways on different planets," Craig said. "I know there's a piece missing out of mine. I know what it is." He put his hand lightly on her shoulder. "Some holidays I fly down to Russel Island just to look at the Great Russel there, and then I know. I wish I could take you to see him. He'd make you understand."

"I understand. I just don't agree."

She swished and splashed brushes, but she didn't pull her shoulder away from his hand. Craig thought about what she had said.

"Why is it you never see a dead phyto? Why is it there ain't enough dead wood on a whole continent to make one camp fire?" he asked. "What eats 'em? What keeps 'em down?"

She laughed and turned back to him, making his arm slide across her shoulders. He barely let it touch her.

"They eat themselves internally. We call it resorption," she said. "They can grow themselves again in another place and form, as a ringwall, for instance. Roy, this planet has never known death or decay. Everything is resorbed and reconstituted. We try to kill it and it suffers but its—yes, its *mind*—can't form the idea of death. There's no way to *think* death biochemically."

"Oh bullets, Midori! Phytos can't think," he said. "I wonder, can they even feel?"

"Yes, they feel!" She rose to her feet, throwing off his arm. "Their piping is a cry of pain," she said. "Papa Toyama can remember when the planet was almost silent. Since he's been here, twenty years, their temperature has risen twelve degrees, their metabolic rate and speed of neural impulse doubled, chronaxy halved—"

Craig stood up too and raised

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his hands. "Hold your fire, Midori," he pleaded. "You know I don't know all them words. You're mad at me." It was too dark to see her face plainly.

"I think I'm just afraid," she said. "I'm afraid of what we've been doing that we don't know about."

"The piping always makes me feel sad, kind of," Craig said. "I never would hurt a phyto. But Great Russel, when you think about whole continents hurting and crying, day and night for years—you scare me too, Midori."

She began packing her painting kit. Craig pulled on his boot. It laced up easily, without any pain.

"We'll go to my house. I'll make our supper," she said.

They had used to do that sometimes. Those were the best times. He took the kit and walked beside her, hardly limping at all. They started up the cliff path.

"Why did you stay on past your contract, if the work makes you sad?" she asked suddenly.

"Two more years and I'll have enough saved to buy me a Great Russel hunt back on Mordin," he said. "I guess you think that's a pretty silly reason."

"Not at all. I thought you might have an even sillier reason."

He fumbled for a remark, not understanding her sudden chill. Then Jordan's voice bawled from above.

"Craig! Ho Craig!"

"Craig aye!"

"Come a-running!" Jordan yelled. "Bork's raising hell cause you ain't loading pellets. I saved chow for you."

The rest of the field period was much better. Jordan took his turn on camp chores and joked Rice and Whelan into doing the same. Only Wilde and Cobb still called Craig "Blanky." Craig felt good about things. Jordan sat beside him in the control cabin as Craig brought the flyer home to Base Island. Russel Island loomed blue to the south and the Main Continent coast range toothed the eastern sea rim.

"Home again. Beer and the range, eh, Craig?" Jordan said. "We'll get in some hunting, maybe."

"Hope so," Craig said.

Base Island looked good. It was four thousand square miles of savanna and rolling hills with stands of young oak and beech. It teemed with game animals and birds transplanted from Mordin. On its northern tip buildings and fields made the rectilinear pattern of man. Sunlight gleamed on square miles of *Thanasis* greenhouses behind their ionic stockades. Base Island was a promise of the planet's future, when *Thanasis* would have killed off the phytos and been killed in its turn and the wholesome life of Planet Mordin

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replaced them both. Base Island was home.

They were the first ringwalling team to come in. Wilde reported twelve hundred miles of ringwall destroyed, fifty percent better than the old Belconti average. Barim, the Chief Huntsman, congratulated them. He was a burly, deep-voiced man with roached gray hair and four red dots on his forehead. It was the first time Craig had ever shaken hands with a man who had killed four Great Russels. Barim rewarded the crew with a week on food hunting detail. Jordan teamed up with Craig. Craig shot twenty deer and twelve pigs and scores of game birds. His bag was better than Cobb's. Jordan joked at Cobb about it, and it made the sparrowy little man very angry.

The new men had brought a roaring, jovial atmosphere to Base Camp that Craig rather liked. He picked up camp gossip. Barim had ordered immediate production of translocator pollen. Mildred Ames, the Belconti Chief Biologist, had refused. But the labs were Mordin property. Barim ordered his own men to work on it. Miss Ames raised shrill hell. Barim barred all Belcontis from the labs. Miss Ames counter-attacked, rapier against bludgeon, and got her staff back into the labs. They were to observe only, for science and the record. It had been very lively, Craig gathered.

Jealous, scared we'll show 'em up, the Mordin lab men laughed. And so we will, by the bones of Great Russel!

Craig saw Miss Ames several times around the labs. She was a tall, slender woman and now she looked pinch-mouthed and unhappy. She made Sidis a lab observer. He would not ringwall any more. Craig thought about what Midori had told him. He particularly liked that notion of resorption and waited for his chance to spring it at the mess table. It came one morning at breakfast. Wilde's crew shared a table with lab men in the raftered, stone-floored mess hall. It was always a clamor of voices and rattling mess gear. Craig sat between Cobb and Jordan and across from a squat, bald headed lab man named Joe Breen. Joe brought up the subject of ringwalls. Craig saw his chance.

"Them ringwalls, how they make 'em," he said. "They eat themselves and grow themselves again. It's called resorption."

"They're resorbing sons of guns, ain't they?" Joe said. "How do you like the way they mate?"

Wilde shouted from the head of the table. "That way's not for me!"

"What do they mean?"

Craig whispered it to Jordon. Cobb heard him.

"Blanky wants to know the facts of life," Cobb said loudly. "Who'll tell him?"

"Who but old Papa Bork?"

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Wilde shouted. "Here's what they do, Blanky. When a flitterbug gets that funny feeling it rounds up from one to a dozen others. They clump on a stem and get resorbed into one of them pinkish swellings you're all the time seeing. After a while it splits and a mess of crawlers falls out. Get it?"

They were all grinning. Craig blushed and shook his head.

"They crawl off and plant themselves and each one grows into a phytogenous stem," Jordan said. "For a year it buds off new phytos like mad. Then it turns into a vegetative stem."

"Hell, I seen plenty crawlers," Craig said. "I just didn't know they were seeds."

"Know how to tell the boy crawlers from the girl crawlers, Blanky?" Cobb asked. Joe Breen laughed.

"Lay off, Cobb," Jordan said. "You don't tell their sex, you count it," he told Craig. "They got one pair of legs for each parent."

"Hey, you know, that's good!" Wilde said. "Maybe a dozen sexes, each one tearing a piece off all the others in one operation. That's good, all right!"

"Once in a lifetime, it better be good," Joe said. "But Great Russel, talk about polyploidy and multihybrids—wish we could breed *Thanasis* that way."

"I'll breed my own way," Wilde said. "Just you give me the chance."

"These Belconti women think Mordinmen are crude," Joe said. "You'll just have to save it up for Mordin."

"There's a pretty little target lives alone on Burton Island," Wilde said.

"Yeah! Blanky knows her," Cobb said. "Can she be had, Blanky?"

"No!" Craig clamped his big hand around his coffee cup. "She's funny, quiet, keeps to herself a lot," he said. "But she's decent and good."

"Maybe Blanky never tried," Cobb said. He winked at Joe. "Sometimes all you have to do is ask them quiet ones."

"I'm the guy that'll ask, give me the chance!" Wilde shouted. "Old Bork'll come at her with them two red dots a-shining and she'll fall back into loading position slick as gun oil," Joe said.

"Yeah, and he'll find out old One-dot Cobb done nipped in there ahead of him!" Cobb whooped.

The work horn blared. The men stood up in a clatter of scraping feet and chairs.

"You go on brewhouse duty until Monday," Wilde told Craig. "Then we start a new field job."

Craig wished they were back in the field already. He felt a sudden dislike of Base Camp.

The new job was dusting translocator pollen over the many

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North Continent areas where, seen from the air, silver streaking into dark green signaled phyto infiltration of old-strain *Thanasis*. The flowerless killers were wind pollinated, with the sexes on separate plants. Old ringwall scars made an overlapping pattern across half the continent, more often than not covered by silvery, iridescent stands of pure phyto growth where *Thanasis* had once ravaged. Wilde charted new ringwalls to be blown the next time out. It was hot, sweaty work in the black protective suits and helmets. They stayed contaminated and ate canned rations and forgot about campfires. After two weeks their pollen cargo was used up and they landed at Burton Island. They spent half a day decontaminating. As soon as he could, Craig broke away and hurried down the gorge path.

He found Midori by the pool. She had been bathing. Her yellow print dress molded damply to her rounded figure and her hair still dripped. What if I'd come a few minutes earlier, Craig could not help thinking. He remembered Cobb's raucous voice: sometimes all you have to do is ask them quiet ones. He shook his head. No. No.

"Hello, Midori," he said.

Small phytos, patterned curiously in gold and scarlet and green, clung to her bare arms and shoulders. She was glad to see him. She smiled sadly when he told her about spreading translocator pollen. A phyto settled on Craig's shoulder and he tried to change the subject.

"What makes 'em do that?" he asked. "The guys think they suck blood, but they never leave no mark on me."

"They take fluid samples, but so tiny you can't feel it."

He shook the phyto off his hand. "Do they really?"

"Tiny, tiny samples. They're curious about us."

"Just tasting of us, huh?" He frowned. "If they can eat us, how come us and pigs and dinotheres can't eat them?"

"Foolish Roy! They don't *eat* us!" She stamped a bare foot. "They want to understand us, but the only symbols they have are atoms and groups and radicals and so on." She laughed. "Sometimes I wonder what they do think of us. Maybe they think we're giant seeds. Maybe they think we're each a single, terribly complicated molecule." She brushed her lips against a small scarlet and silver phyto on her wrist and it shifted to her cheek. "This is just their way of trying to live with us," she said.

"Just the same, it's what we call eating."

"They eat only water and sunshine. They can't conceive of life that preys on life." She stamped her foot again. "Eating! Oh, Roy! It's more like a kiss!"

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Craig wished he were a phyto, to touch her smooth arms and shoulders and her firm cheek. He inhaled deeply.

"I know a better kind of kiss," he said.

"Do you, Roy?" She dropped her eyes.

"Yes, I do," he said unsteadily. Needles prickled his sweating hands that felt as big as baskets. "Midori, I . . . someday I . . ."

"Yes, Roy?"

"Ho the camp!" roared a voice from up the path.

It was Wilde, striding along, grinning with his horse teeth.

"Pop Toyama's throwing us a party, come along," he said. He looked closely at Midori and whistled. "Hey there, pretty little Midori, you look good enough to eat," he said.

"Thank you, Mr. Wilde." The small voice was cold.

On the way up the path Wilde told Midori, "I learned the *Tanko* dance on Belconti. I told Pop if he'd play, you and I'd dance it for him, after we eat."

"I don't feel at all like dancing," Midori said.

Wilde and Cobb flanked Midori at the dinner table and vied in paying rough court to her afterward in the small sitting room. Craig talked to Helen Toyama in a corner. She was a plump, placid woman and she pretended not to hear the rough hunting stories Jordan, Rice and Whelan were telling each other. Papa Toyama kept on his feet, pouring the hot wine. He looked thin and old and fragile. Craig kept his eye on Midori. Wilde was getting red faced and loud and he wouldn't keep his hands off Midori. He gulped bowl after bowl of wine. Suddenly he stood up.

"Hey, a toast!" he shouted. "On your feet, men! Guns up for pretty little Midori!"

They stood and drank. Wilde broke his bowl with his hands. He put one fragment in his pocket and handed another to Midori. She shook her head, refusing it. Wilde grinned.

"We'll see a lot of you folks, soon," he said. "Meant to tell you. Barim's moving you in to Base Camp. Our lab men will fly over next week to pick out what they can use of your gear."

Papa Toyama's lined, gentle face paled. "We have always understood that Burton Island would remain a sanctuary for the study of phytos," he said.

"It was never a Mordin understanding, Pop."

Toyama looked helplessly from Midori to Helen. "How much time have we to close out our projects?" he asked.

Wilde shrugged. "Say a month, if you need that long."

"We do, and more." Anger touched the old man's voice. "Why can't we at least stay here until the Belconti relief ship comes?"

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"This has been our home for twenty years," Helen said softly.

"I'll ask the Huntsman to give you all the time he can," Wilde said more gently. "But as soon as he pulls a harvest of pure-line translocator seed out of the forcing chambers, he wants to seed this island. We figure to get a maximum effect in virgin territory."

Papa Toyama blinked and nodded. "More wine?" he asked, looking around the room.

When Wilde and Midori danced, Papa Toyama's music sounded strange to Craig. It sounded sad as the piping of phytos.

These translocator hybrids were sure deathific, the lab men chortled. Their free-systems had high thermal stability; that would get around the sneaky phyto trick of running a fever. Their recombination index was fantastic. There would be a time lag in gross effect, of course. Phyto infiltration of old-strain *Thanasis* areas was still accelerating. Belconti bastards should've started translocation years ago, the lab men grumbled. Scared, making their jobs last, wanted this planet for themselves. But wait. Just wait.

Craig and Jordan became good friends. One afternoon Craig sat waiting for Jordan at a table in the cavernous, smoky beer hall. On the rifle range an hour earlier he had fired three perfect Great Russel patterns and beaten Jordan by ten points. Barim had chanced by, slapped Craig's shoulder, and called him "stout rifle." Craig glowed at the memory. He saw Jordan coming with the payoff beer, threading between crowded, noisy tables and the fire pit where the pig carcass turned. Round face beaming, Jordan set four bottles on the rough plank table.

"Drink up, hunter!" he said. "Boy, today you earned it!"

Craig grinned back at him and took a long drink. "My brain was ice," he said. "It wasn't like me doing it."

Jordan drank and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "That's how it takes you when it's for real," he said. "You turn into one big rifle."

"What's it like, Jordan? What's it really like, then?"

"Nobody can ever say." Jordan looked upward into the smoke. "You don't eat for two days, they take you through the hunt ceremonies, you get to feeling light headed and funny, like you don't have a name or a family any more. Then. . . ." His nostrils flared and he clenched his fists. "Then . . . well, for me . . . there was Great Russel coming at me, getting bigger and bigger . . . filling the whole world . . . just him and me in the world." Jordan's face paled and he closed his eyes. "That's the moment! Oh, oh oh, that's the moment!" He sighed,

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then looked solemnly at Craig. "I fired the pattern like it was somebody else, the way you just said. Three sided and I *felt* it hit wide, but I picked it up with a spare."

Craig's heart thudded. He leaned forward. "Were you scared then, even the least little bit?"

"You ain't sacred then, because you're Great Russel himself." Jordan leaned forward too, whispering. 'you feel your own shots hit you, Craig, and you know you can't never be scared again. It's like a holy dance you and Great Russel been practicing for a million years. After that, somewhere inside you, you never stop doing that dance until you die." Jordan sighed again, leaned back and reached for his bottle.

"I dream about it lots," Craig said. His hands were shaking. "I wake up scared and sweating. Well, anyway, I mailed my application to the Hunt College by the ship you came here on."

"You'll gun through, Craig. Did you hear the Huntsman call you 'stout rifle'?"

"Yeah, like from a long way off." Craig grinned happily.

"Move your fat rump, Jordan," a jovial voice shouted.

It was Joe Breen, the bald, squat lab man. He had six bottles clasped in his hairy arms. Sidis came behind him. Joe put down his bottles.

"This is Sidis, my Belconti seeing eye," he said.

"We know Sidis, he's an old ringwaller himself," Jordan said. "Hi, Sidis. You're getting fat."

"Hello, Jordan, Roy," Sidis said. "Don't see you around much."

He and Joe sat down. Joe uncapped bottles.

"We're in the field most all the time now," Craig said.

"You'll be out more, soon as we pull the pure-line translocater seed," Joe said. "We almost got it. Sidis has kittens every day."

"You grow 'em, we'll plant 'em, eh Craig?" Jordan said. "Sidis, why don't you get off Joe's neck and come ringwalling again?"

"Too much to learn here in the labs," Sidis said. "We're all going to make our reputations out of this, if Joe and his pals don't kill us before we can publish."

"Damn the labs; give me the field. Right, Craig?"

"Right. It's clean and good out with the phytos," Craig said. "This resorption they got, it does away with things being dirty and rotten and dead—"

"Well, arrow my guts!" Joe thumped down his bottle. "Beer must make you poetical, Blanky," he snorted. "What you really mean is, they eat their own dead and their own dung. Now make a poem out of that!"

Craig felt the familiar helpless anger. "With them everything is alive all the time without stopping," he said. "All you can say they eat is water and sunshine."

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"They eat water and fart helium," Joe said. "I been reading some old reports. Some old-timer name of Toyama thought they could catalyze hydrogen fusion."

"They do. That's established," Sidis said. "They can grow at night and underground and in the winter. When you stop to think about it, they're pretty wonderful."

"Damn if you ain't a poet too," Joe said. "All you Belcontis are poets."

"We're not, but I wish we had more poets," Sidis said. "Roy, you haven't forgotten what I told you once?"

"I ain't a poet," Craig said. "I can't rhyme nothing."

"Craig's all right. Barim called him 'stout rifle' on the range this afternoon," Jordan said. He wanted to change the subject. "Joe, that old guy Toyama, he's still here. Out on Burton Island. We got orders to move him in to Base Camp on our next field trip."

"Great Russel, he must've been here twenty years!" Joe said. "How's he ever stood it?"

"Got his wife along," Jordan said. "Craig here is going on three years. He's standing it."

"He's turning into a damned poet," Joe said. "Blanky, you better go home for sure on the next relief ship, while you're still a kind of a man."

Craig found Midori alone in her house. It looked bare. Her paintings lay strapped together beside crates of books and clothing. She smiled at him, but she looked tired and sad.

"It's hard, Roy. I don't want to leave here," she said. "I can't bear to think of what you're going to do to this island."

"I never think about what we do, except that it just has to be," he said. "Can I help you pack?"

"I'm finished. We've worked for days, packing. And now Barim won't give us transportation for our cases of specimens." She looked ready to cry. "Papa Toyama's heart is broken," she said.

Craig bit his lip. "Heck, we can carry fifty tons," he said. "We got the room. Why don't I ask Mr. Wilde to take 'em anyway?"

She grasped his arm and looked up at him. "Would you, Roy? I . . . don't want to ask him a favor. The cases are stacked outside the lab building."

Craig found his chance after supper at the Toyamas. Wilde left off paying court to Midori and carried his wine bowl outside. Craig followed and asked him. Wilde was looking up at the sky. Both moons rode high in a clear field of stars.

"What's in the cases, did you say?" Wilde asked.

"Specimens, slides and stuff. It's kind of like art to 'em."

"All ours now. I'm supposed to destroy it," Wilde said. "Oh, hell! All right, if you want to strong-

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back the stuff aboard." He chuckled. "I about got Midori talked into taking one last walk down to that pool of hers. I'll tell her you're loading the cases." He nudged Craig. "Might help, huh?"

When he had the eighty-odd cases stowed and lashed, Craig lifted the flyer to a hundred feet to test his trim. Through his side window he saw Wilde and Midori come out of the Toyama house and disappear together down the gorge path. Wilde had his arm across her shoulders. Craig grounded and went back, but he could not rejoin the party. For an hour he paced outside in dull, aching anger. Then his crewmates came out, arguing noisily.

"Ho Craig! Where been, boy?" Jordan slapped his shoulder. "I just bet Cobb you could outgun him tomorrow, like you did me. We'll stick old Cobbo for the beer, eh, boy?"

"Like hell," Cobb said.

"Like shooting birds in a cage," Jordan said. "Come along, Craig. Get some sleep. You got to be right tomorrow."

"I ain't sleepy," Craig said.

"Bet old Bork's shooting himself a cage bird about now," Cobb said.

They all laughed except Craig.

On the trip to Base Camp next morning Craig, at the controls, heard Wilde singing hunt songs and making jokes back in the main cabin. He seemed to be still drunk. With high good humor he even helped his crew deliver the baggage to Belconti quarters. Craig had no chance to speak to Midori. He was not sure he wanted a chance. That afternoon Cobb outgunned Craig badly. Jordan tried to console him, but Craig drank himself sodden. He woke the next morning to Jordan's insistent shaking.

"Wake up, damn it! We're going out again, right away!" Jordan said. "Don't let Bork catch you sleeping late. Something went wrong for him last night over in Belconti quarters, and he's mad as a split snake."

Still dizzy and sick four hours later, and wearing his black pro suit, Craig grounded the flyer again at Burton Island. They had a cargo of pure-line translocater seed. The men got out. Wilde wore a black frown.

"Jordan and Blanky, you seed that gorge path all the way to the waterfall," he ordered.

"I thought we picked high, sunny places," Jordan objected. "It's shady down there."

"Seed it, I told you!" Wilde bared his horse teeth. "Come on, Rice, Cobb, Whelan! Get going around these buildings!"

When they had finished the seeding, Jordan and Craig rested briefly on the quartz boulder near the pool. For the first time, Craig let himself look around. Phytos danced piping above their heads.

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The stems marching up the steep slopes transmuted the golden sun glare to a strong, silvery moonlight. It sparkled on the quartz ledge and the cascading water.

"Say, it's pretty down here," Jordan said. "Kind of twangs your string, don't it? It'll make a nice hunting camp someday."

"Let's go up," Craig said. "They'll be waiting."

Lifting out of the field at sunset, Craig looked down at the deserted station from his side window. Midori's house looked small and forlorn and accusing.

At Base Camp six men died of a mutant free-system before the immunizer could be synthesized. An escaped control virus wiped out a translocator seed crop and Wilde's men got an unscheduled rest after months of driving work. The once roaring, jovial atmosphere of Base Camp had turned glum. The lab men muttered about Belconti sabotage. They drank a great deal, not happily.

On his first free day Craig checked out a sports flyer, found Midori in the Belconti quarters, and asked her to go riding. She came, wearing a white blouse and pearls and a blue and yellow flare skirt. She seemed sad, her small face half dreaming and her eyes unfocused. Craig forgot about being angry with her and wanted to cheer her. When he was a mile up and heading south, he tried.

"You look pretty in that dress, like a phyto," he said.

She smiled faintly. "My poor phytos. How I miss them," she said. "Where are we going, Roy?"

"Russel Island, down ahead there. I want you to see Great Russel."

"I want to see him," she said. A moment later she cried out and grasped his arm. "Look at that color in the sky! Over to the right!"

It was a patch of softly twinkling, shifting colors far off and high in the otherwise cloudless sky.

"Migratory phytos," he said. "We see 'em all the time."

"I know. Let's go up close. Please, Roy."

He arrowed the flyer toward the green-golden cloud. It resolved into millions of phytos, each with its opalescent hydrogen sac inflated and drifting northwest in the trade wind.

"They stain the air with beauty!" Midori cried. Her face was vividly awake and her eyes sparkled. "Go clear inside, please, Roy!"

She used to look like that when she was painting in the gorge, Craig remembered. It was the way he liked her best. He matched wind speed inside the cloud and at once lost all sense of motion. Vividly colored phytos obscured land, sea and sky. Craig felt lost and dizzy. He moved closer to Midori. She slid open her window to

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let in the piping and the spicy perfume.

"It's so beautiful I can't bear it," she said. "They have no eyes, Roy. We must know for them how beautiful they are."

She began piping and trilling in her clear voice. A phyto patterned in scarlet and green and silver dropped to her outstretched hand and she sang to it. It deflated its balloon and quivered velvety wings. Craig shifted uneasily.

"It acts almost like it knows you," he said.

"It knows I love it."

"Love? Something so different?" He frowned. "That ain't how I mean love."

She looked up. "How do you understand love?"

"Well, you want to protect people you love, fight for 'em, do things for 'em." He was blushing. "What could you do for a phyto?"

"Stop trying to exterminate them," she said softly.

"Don't start that again. I don't like to think about it either. But I know it just has to be."

"It will never be," she said. "I know. Look at all the different color patterns out there. Papa Toyama remembers when phytos were almost all green. They developed the new pigments and patterns to make counter-substances against *Thanasis.*". She lowered her voice. "Think of it, Roy. All the colors and patterns are new ideas in this planet's strange, inconceivably powerful biochemical mind. This cloud is a message, from one part of it to another part of it. Doesn't it frighten you?"

"You scare me." He moved slightly away from her. "I didn't know they been changing like that."

"Who stays here long enough to notice? Who cares enough to look and see?" Her lips trembled. "But just think of the agony and the changings, through all the long years men have been trying to kill this planet. What if something . . . somehow . . . suddenly *understands?*"

Craig's neck-hair bristled. He moved further away. He felt weird and alone, without time or place or motion in that piping, perfumed phyto cloud-world. He couldn't face Midori's eyes.

"Damn it, this planet belongs to Great Russel!" he said harshly. "We'll win yet! At least they'll never take back Base or Russel Islands. Their seeds can't walk on water."

She kept her eyes on his, judging or pleading or questioning, he could not tell. He could not bear them. He dropped his own eyes.

"Shake that thing off your hand!" he ordered. "Close your window. I'm getting out of here!"

Half an hour later Craig hovered the flyer over the wholesome green grass and honest oak trees of

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Russel Island. He found Great Russel and held him in the magniviewer and they watched him catch and kill a buffalo. Midori gasped.

"Ten feet high at the shoulder. Four tons, and light on his feet as a cat," Craig said proudly. "That long, reddish hair is like wire. Them bluish bare spots are like armor plate."

"Aren't his great teeth enough to kill the cattle he eats?" she asked. "What enemies can he have, to need those terrible horns and claws?"

"His own kind. And us. Our boys will hunt him here, here on this planet, and become men. Our men will hunt him here, to heal their souls."

"You love him, don't you? Did you know you were a poet?" She could not take her eyes off the screen. "He *is* beautiful, fierce and terrible, not what women call beauty."

"He's the planet-shaker, he is! It takes four perfect shots to bring him down," Craig said. "He jumps and roars like the world ending—oh, Midori, I'll have my day!"

"But you might be killed."

"The finest kind of death. In our lost colony days our old fathers fought him with bow and arrow," Craig said. "Even now, sometimes, we form a sworn band and fight him to the death with spears and arrows."

"I've read of sworn bands. I suppose you can't help how you feel."

"I don't want to help it! A sworn band is the greatest honor that can come to a man," he said. "But thanks for trying to understand."

"I want to understand. I want to, Roy. Is it that you can't believe in your own courage until you face Great Russel?"

"That's just what women can't ever understand." He faced the question in her eyes. "Girls can't help turning into women, but a man has to make himself," he said. "It's like I don't have my man's courage until I get it from Great Russel. There's chants and stuff with salt and fire . . . afterwards the boy eats pieces of the heart and . . . I shouldn't talk about that. You'll laugh."

"I feel more like crying." She kept her strange eyes on his. "There are different kinds of courage, Roy. You have more courage than you know. You must find your true courage in your own heart, not in Great Russel's."

"I can't." He looked away from her eyes. "I'm nothing inside me, until I face Great Russel."

"Take me home, Roy. I'm afraid I'm going to cry." She dropped her face to her folded hands. "I don't have much courage," she said.

They flew to Base Camp in silence. When Craig helped her down from the flyer, she was really crying. She bowed her head mo-

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mentarily against his chest and the spicy phyto smell rose from her hair.

"Goodbye, Roy," she said.

He could barely hear her. Then she turned and ran.

Craig did not see her again. Wilde's crew spent all its time in the field, blowing ringwalls and planting translocater seed. Craig was glad to be away. The atmosphere of Base Camp had turned from glum to morose. Everywhere across North Continent new phyto growth in silver, green and scarlet spotted the dark green *Thanasis* areas. Other ringwall crews reported the same of South and Main Continents. Wilde's temper became savage; Cobb cursed bitterly at trifles; even happy-go-lucky Jordan stopped joking. Half asleep one night in field camp, Craig heard Wilde shouting incredulous questions at the communicator inside the flyer. He came out cursing to rouse the camp.

"Phytos are on Base Island! Stems popping up everywhere!"

"Great Russel in the sky!" Jordan jerked full awake. "How come?"

"Belconti bastards planted 'em, that's how!" Wilde said. "Barim's got 'em all arrested under camp law."

Cobb began cursing in a steady, monotonous voice.

"That . . . cracks . . . the gunflint!" Jordan said.

"We'll kill 'em by hand," Wilde said grimly. "We'll sow the rest of our seed broadcast and go in to help."

Craig felt numb and unbelieving. Shortly after noon he grounded the flyer at Base Camp, in the foul area beyond the emergency rocket launching frame. Wilde cleaned up at once and went to see Barim, while his crew decontaminated the flyer. When they came through the irradiation tunnel in clean denims, Wilde was waiting.

"Blanky, come with me!" he barked.

Craig followed him into the gray stone building at the field edge. Wilde pushed him roughly through a door, said "Here he is, Huntsman," and closed the door again.

Rifles, bows and arrows decorated the stone walls. The burly Chief Huntsman, cold eyed under his roached gray hair and the four red dots, sat facing the door from behind a wooden desk. He motioned Craig to sit down in one of the row of wooden chairs along the inner wall. Craig sat stiffly in the one nearest the door. His mouth was dry.

"Roy Craig, you are on your trial for life and honor under camp law," Barim said sternly. "Swear now to speak truth in the blood of Great Russel."

"I swear to speak truth in the blood of Great Russel."

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Craig's voice sounded false to him. He began to sweat.

"What would you say of someone who deliberately betrayed our project to destroy the phytos?" Barim asked.

"He would be guilty of hunt treason, sir. An outlaw."

"Very well." Barim clasped his hands and leaned forward, his gray eyes hard on Craig's eyes. "What did you tell Bork Wilde was in those cases you flew from Burton Island to Base Island?"

Craig's stomach knotted. "Slides, specimens, science stuff, sir."

Barim questioned him closely about the cases. Craig tried desperately to speak truth without naming Midori. Barim forced her name from him, then questioned him on her attitudes. A terrible fear grew in Roy Craig. He kept his eyes on Barim's eyes and spoke a tortured kind of truth, but he would not attaint Midori. Finally Barim broke their locked gazes and slapped his desk.

"Are you in *love* with Midori Blake, boy?" he roared.

Craig dropped his glance. "I don't know, sir," he said. He thought miserably: how do you know when you're in love? "Well . . . I like to be around her . . . I never thought . . . I know we're good friends." He gulped I don't think so, sir," he said finally.

"Phyto seeds are loose on Base Island," Barim said. "Who planted them?"

"They can walk and plant themselves, sir." Craig's mouth was dry as powder. He avoided Barim's glance.

"Would Midori Blake be morally capable of bringing them here and releasing them?"

Craig's face twisted. "Morally . . . I'm not clear on the word, sir. . . ." Sweat dripped on his hands.

"I mean, would she have the guts to want to do it and to do it?"

Ice clamped Craig's heart. He looked Barim in the eye. "No, sir!" he said. "I won't never believe that about Midori!"

Barim smiled grimly and slapped his desk again. "Wilde!" he shouted. "Bring them in!"

Midori, in white blouse and black skirt, came in first. Her face was pale but composed, and she smiled faintly at Craig. Mildred Ames followed, slender and thin faced in white, then Wilde, scowling blackly. Wilde sat between Craig and Miss Ames, Midori on the end.

"Miss Blake, young Craig has clearly been your dupe, as you insist he has," Barim said. "Your confession ends your trial except for sentencing. Once more I beg of you to say why you have done this."

"You would not understand,' Midori said. "Be content with what you know."

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Her voice was low but firm. Craig felt sick with dismay.

"I can understand without condoning," Barim said. "For your own sake, I must know your motive. You may be insane."

"You know I'm sane. You know that."

"Yes," Barim's wide shoulders sagged. "Invent a motive, then." He seemed almost to plead. "Say you hate Mordin. Say you hate me."

"I hate no one. I'm sorry for you all."

"I'll give you a reason!" Miss Ames jumped to her feet, thin face flaming. "Your reckless, irresponsible use of translocation endangers us all! Accept defeat and go home!"

She helped Barim recover his composure. He smiled.

"Please sit down, Miss Ames," he said calmly. "In three months your relief ship will come to take you to safety. But we neither accept defeat nor fear death. We will require no tears of anyone."

Miss Ames sat down, her whole posture shouting defiance. Barim swung his eyes back to Midori. His face turned to iron.

"Miss Blake, you are guilty of hunt treason. You have betrayed your own kind in a fight with an alien life form," he said. "Unless you admit to some recognizably *human* motive, I must conclude that you abjure your own humanity."

Midori said nothing. Crag stole a glance at her. She sat erect but undefiant, small feet together, small hands folded in her lap. Barim slapped his desk and stood up.

"Very well. Under camp law I sentence you, Midori Blake, to outlawry from your kind. You are a woman and not of Mordin; therefore I will remit the full severity. You will be set down, lacking everything made with hands, on Russel Island. There you may still be nourished by the roots and berries of the Earth-type life you have wilfully betrayed. If you survive until the Belconti relief ship comes, you will be sent home on it." He burned his glance at her. "Have you anything to say before I cause your sentence to be executed?"

The four red dots blazed against the sudden pallor of the Huntsman's forehead. Something snapped in Craig. He leaped up, shouting into the hush.

"You can't do it, sir! She's little and weak! She doesn't know our ways—"

"Down! Shut up, you whimpering fool!" Wilde slapped and wrestled Craig to his seat again. "Silence!" Barim thundered. Wilde sat down, breathing hard. The room was hushed again.

"I understand your ways too well," Midori said. "Spare me your mercy. Put me down on Burton Island."

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"Midori, no!" Miss Ames turned to her. "You'll starve. *Thanasis* will kill you!"

"You can't understand either, Mildred," Midori said. "Mr. Barim, will you grant my request?"

Barim leaned forward, resting on his hands. "It is so ordered," he said huskily. "Midori Blake, almost you make me know again the taste of fear." He straightened and turned to Wilde, his voice suddenly flat and impersonal. "Carry out the sentence, Wilde."

Wilde stood up and pulled Craig to his feet. "Get the crew to the flyer. Wear pro suits," he ordered. "*Run,* boy."

Craig stumbled out into the twilight.

Craig drove the flyer northwest from Base Camp at full throttle, overtaking the sun, making it day again. Silence ached in the main cabin behind him. He leaned away from it, as if to push the flyer forward with his muscles. He was refusing to think at all. He knew it had to be and still he could not bear it. After an anguished forever he grounded the flyer roughly beside the deserted buildings on Burton Island. They got out, the men in black pro suits, Midori still in blouse and skirt. She stoood apart quietly and looked toward her little house on the cliff edge. *Thanasis* thrust up dark green and knee high along all the paths.

"Break out ringwall kits. Blow all the buildings," Wilde ordered. "Blanky, you come with me."

At Midori's house Wilde ordered Craig to sink explosive pellets every three feet along the foundations. A single pellet would have been enough. Craig found his voice.

"The Huntsman didn't say do this, Mr. Wilde. Can't we at least leave her this house?"

"She won't need it. *Thanasis* will kill her before morning."

"Let her have it to die in, then. She loved this little house."

Wilde grinned without mirth, baring his big horse teeth.

"She's *outlaw,* Blanky. You know the law: nothing made with hands."

Craig bowed his head, teeth clamped. Wilde whistled tunelessly as Craig set the pellets. They returned to the flyer and Jordan reported the other buildings ready to blow. His round, jolly face was grim. Midori had not moved. Craig wanted to speak to her, say goodbye. He knew if he tried he would find no words but a howl. Her strange little smile seemed already to remove her to another world a million light-years from Roy Craig and his kind. Cobb looked at Midori. His rat face was eager.

"We'll detonate from the air," Wilde said. "The blast will kill anyone standing here."

"We're supposed to take off all her clothes first," Cobb said. "You

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know the law, Bork: nothing made with hands."

"That's right," Wilde said.

Midori took off her blouse. She looked straight at Wilde. Red mist clouded Craig's vision.

"Load the kits," Wilde said abruptly. "Into the flyer, all hands! *Jump,* you dogs!"

From his side window by the controls Craig saw Midori start down the gorge path. She walked as carelessly relaxed as if she were going down to paint. *Thanasis* brushed her bare legs and he thought he saw the angry red spring out. Craig felt the pain in his own skin. He lifted the flyer with a lurching roar and he did not look out when Wilde blew up the buildings.

Away from the sun, southwest toward Base Camp, wrapped in his own thought-vacant hell, Roy Craig raced to meet the night.

With flame, chemicals and grub hoes, the Mordinmen fought their losing battle for Base Island. Craig worked himself groggy with fatigue, to keep from thinking. The phyto stems radiated underground with incredible growth energy. They thrust up redoubly each new day like hydra heads. Newly budded phytos the size of thumbnails tinted the air of Base Island in gaily dancing swirls. Once Craig saw Joe Breen, the squat lab man, cursing and hopping like a frog while he slashed at dancing phytos with an axe. It seemed to express the situation.

Barim made his grim decisions to move camp to Russel Island and seed the home island with *Thanasis.* Craig was helping erect the new camp when he collapsed. He awoke in bed in a small, bare infirmary room at Base Camp. The Mordin doctor took blood samples and questioned him. Craig admitted to joint pains and nausea for several days past.

"I been half crazy, sir," he defended himself. "I didn't know I was sick."

"I've got twenty more do know it," the doctor grunted.

He went out, frowning. Craig slept, to flee in dream-terror from a woman's eyes. He half woke at intervals for medication and clinical tests, to sleep again and face repeatedly a Great Russel dinothere. It looked at him with a woman's inscrutable eyes. He roused into the morning of the second day to find another bed squeezed into the small room, by the window. Papa Toyama was in it. He smiled at Craig.

"Good morning, Roy," he said. "I would be happier to meet you in another place."

Many were down and at least ten had died, he told Craig. The Belconti staff was back in the labs, working frantically to identify agent and vector. Craig felt hollow and his head ached. He did not much care. Dimly he saw

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Miss Ames in a white lab smock come around the foot of his bed to stand between him and Papa Toyama. She took the old man's hand.

"George, old friend, we've found it," she said.

"You do not smile, Mildred."

"I don't smile. All night I've been running a phase analysis of diffraction patterns," she said. "It's what we've feared—a spread of two full Ris units."

"So. Planet Froy again." Papa Toyama's voice was calm. "I would like to be with Helen again, for the little time we have."

"Surely," Miss Ames said. "I'll see to it."

Quick, heavy footsteps sounded outside. A voice broke in.

"Ah. Here you are, Miss Ames."

Barim, in leather hunting clothes, bulked in the door. Miss Ames turned to face him across Craig's bed.

"I'm told you found the virus," Barim said.

"Yes." Miss Ames smiled thinly.

"Well, what counter-measures? Twelve are dead. What can I do?"

"You might shoot at it with a rifle. It is a *Thanasis* free-system that has gotten two degrees of temporal freedom. Does that mean anything to you?"

His heavy jaw set like a trap. "No, but your manner does. It's the plague, isn't it?"

She nodded. "No suit can screen it. No cure is possible. We are all infected."

Barim chewed his lip and looked at her in silence. "For your sake now, I wish we'd never come here," he said at last. "I'll put our emergency rocket in orbit to broadcast a warning message. That will save your relief ship, when it comes, and Belconti can warn the sector." A half-smile softened his bluff, grim features. "Why don't you rub my nose in it? Say you told me so?"

"Need I?" Her chin came up. "I pity you Mordinmen. You must all die now without dignity, crying out for water and your mothers. How you will loathe that!"

"Does that console you?" Barim still smiled. "Not so, Miss Ames. All night I thought it might come to this. Even now men are forging arrow points. We'll form a sworn band and all die fighting Great Russel." His voice deepened and his eyes blazed. "We'll stagger who can, crawl who must, carry our helpless, and all die fighting like men!"

"Like savages! No! No!" Her hands flew up in shocked protest. "Forgive me for taunting you, Mr. Barim. I need your help, all of your men and transport, truly I do. Some of us may live, if we fight hard enough."

"How?" He growled it. "I thought on Planet Froy—"

"Our people on Planet Froy had only human resources. But here, I'm certain that somewhere already the phytos have synthe-

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sized the plague immunizer that seems forever impossible to human science." Her voice shook. "Please help us, Mr. Barim. If we can find it, isolate enough to learn its structure—"

"No." He cut her off bluntly. "Too long a gamble. One doesn't run squealing away from death, Miss Ames. My way is decent and sure."

Her chin came up and her voice sharpened. "How dare you condemn your own men unconsulted? They might prefer a fight for life."

"Hah! You don't know them!" Barim bent to shake Craig's shoulder with rough affection. "You, lad," he said. "You'll get up and walk with a sworn band, won't you?"

"No," Craig said.

He struggled off the pillow, propped shakily on his arms. Miss Ames smiled and patted his cheek.

"You'll stay and help us fight to live, won't you?" she said.

"No," Craig said.

"Think what you say, lad!" Barim said tautly. "Great Russel can die of plague, too. We owe him a clean death."

Craig sat bolt upright. He stared straight ahead.

"I foul the blood of Great Russel," he said slowly and clearly. "I foul it with dung. I foul it with carrion. I foul—"

Barim's fist knocked Craig to the pillow and split his lip. The Huntsman's face paled under his tan.

"You're mad, boy!" he whispered. "Not even in madness may you say those words!"

Craig struggled up again. "You're the crazy ones, not me," he said. He tongued his lip and blood dripped on his tin pajama coat. "I'll die an outlaw, that's how I'll die," he said. "An outlaw, on Burton Island." He met Barim's unbelieving eyes. "I foul the blood—"

"Silence!" Barim shouted. "Outlawry it is. I'll send a party for you, stranger."

He whirled and stamped out. Miss Ames followed him.

"You Mordinmen," she said, shaking her head.

Craig sat on the edge of his bed and pulled his sweat soaked pajamas straight. The room blurred and swam around him. Papa Toyama's smile was like a light.

"I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed. Please forgive us, Papa Toyama," Craig said. "All we know is to kill and kill and kill."

"We all do what we must," the old man said. "Death cancels all debts. It will be good to rest."

"Not my debts. I'll never rest again," Craig said. "All of a sudden I know—Great Russel, *how* I know!—I know I loved Midori Blake."

"She was a strange girl. Helen and I thought she loved you, in

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the old days on our island." Papa Toyama bowed his head. "But our lives are only chips in a waterfall. Goodbye, Roy."

Jordan, in a black pro suit, came shortly after. His face was bitter with contempt. He jerked his thumb at the door.

"On your feet, stranger! Get going!" he snapped.

In pajamas and barefooted, Craig followed him. From somewhere in the infirmary he heard a voice screaming. It sounded like Cobb. They walked across the landing field. Everything seemed under water. Men were rigging to fuel the emergency rocket. Craig sat apart from the others in the flyer. Cobb was missing. Wilde was flushed and shivering and his eyes glared with fever. Jordan took the controls. No one spoke. Craig dozed through colored dream-scraps while the flyer outran the sun. He woke when it grounded in early dawn on Burton Island.

He climbed down and stood swaying beside the flyer. *Thanasis* straggled across the rubble heaps and bulked waist high in the dim light along the paths. Phytos stirred on their stems and piped sleepily in the damp air. Craig's eyes searched for something, a memory, a presence, a completion and rest, he did not know what. He felt it very near him. Wilde came behind him, shoving. Craig moved away.

"Stranger!" Wilde called.

Craig turned. He looked into the fever glaring eyes above the grinning horse teeth. The teeth gaped.

"I foul the blood of Midori Blake. I foul it with dung. I—"

Strength from nowhere exploded into the bone and muscle of Roy Craig. He sprang and felt the teeth break under his knuckles. Wilde fell. The others scrambled down from the flyer.

"Blood right! Blood right!" Craig shouted.

"Blood right!" Wilde echoed.

Jordan held back Rice and Whelan. Strength flamed along Craig's nerves. Wilde rose, spitting blood, swinging big fists. Craig closed to meet him, berserk in fury. The world wheeled and tilted, shot with flashing colors, gasping with grunts and curses, but rock-steady in the center of things Wilde pressed the fight and Craig hurled it back on him. He felt the blows without pain, felt his ribs splinter, felt the good shock of his own blows all the way to his ankles. Bruising falls on the rough slag, feet stamping, arms grappling, hands tearing, breath sobbing, both men on knees clubbing with fists and forearms. The scene cleared and Craig saw through one eye Wilde crumpled and inert before him. He rose unsteadily. He felt weightless and clean inside.

"Blood right, stranger," Jordan said, grim faced and waiting.

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"Let it go," Craig said.

He turned down the gorge path, ignoring his chest pains, crashing through the rank *Thanasis*. *Home!* going *home!* going *home!* a bell tolled in his head. He did not look back.

Thanasis grew more sparsely in the shaded gorge. Craig heard the waterfall and old memories cascaded upon him. He rounded to view of it and his knees buckled and he knelt beside the boulder. She was very near him. He felt an overpowering sense of her presence. She was this place.

Dawn light shafted strongly into the gorge. It sparkled on the quartz ledge and made reflecting rainbows in the spray above the pool. Phytos lifted from ghost-silver stems to dance their own rainbow in the air. Something rose in Craig's throat and choked him. Tears blurred his good eye.

"Midori," he said. "Midori."

The feeling overwhelmed him. His heart was bursting. He could find no words. He raised his arms and battered face to the sky and cried out incoherently. Then a blackness swept away his intolerable pain.

Titanic stirrings. Windy rushings. Sharp violences swarming.

Fittings-together in darkness. A trillion times a trillion times a trillion patient searchings. Filtering broken lights, silver, green, golden, scarlet.

Bluntings. Smoothings, Transforming into otherness.

Flickering awareness, planet-vast and atom-tiny, no focus between. The proto-sensorium of a god yearning to know himself. Endless, patient agony in search of being.

Form and color outfolding in middle focus. Flashings of terrible joy and love unspeakable. It looked. Listened. Felt. Smelled. Tasted.

Crystalline polar wastes. Wine of sweet. Gold-glint of sun on blue water. Perfumed wind caress. Thorn of bitter. Rain patter. Silver-green sweep of hill. Storm roar and shaking. Sharp of salt. Sleeping mountains. Surf beat. Star patterns dusted on blackness. Clear of sour. Cool moons of night.

It knew and loved.

Ragged line of men gaunt under beard stubble. Green plain. High golden sun. Roar. Shaggy redness bounding. Bow twangs. Whispering arrow lights. Deep-chested shouts of men. Lances thrusting. Bodies ripped. Thrown. Horn-impaled, beating with fists. Great shape kneeling. Threshing. Streaming blood. Deep man-shouts dwindling to a silence.

It knew and sorrowed.

The woman bathing. Sunlight hair streaming. Grace beyond bearing. Beauty that was pain.

It shook terribly with love.

Rested readiness, whole and unblemished forever. The man

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newly-minted. Bursting excitement. HOME! coming HOME! coming HOME!

It woke into its world.

It was like waking up fresh and rested on the fine morning of a day when something glorious was going to happen. He was sitting up in a cavity at the base of a huge phyto stem. He brushed away papery shreds and saw the pool and heard the waterfall. With a glad cry, Midori came running. He stood up whole and strong to greet her.

"Midori! Midori, when you die . . . ?" He wanted to know a million things, but one came first. "Can I ever lose you again, now?"

"Never again."

She was smiling radiantly. They were both naked. He was not excited and not ashamed.

"We didn't die, Roy," she said. "We're just made new."

"The plague killed everybody."

"I know. But we didn't die."

"Tell me."

He listened like a child, believing without understanding. Somewhere in its infinite life-spectrum the planetary life had matched up a band for humans. "As if we were single giant molecules and it discovered our structural formula," she said. "That's how it thinks." They had been resorbed into the planetary biomass, cleansed of *Thanasis,* and reconstituted whole and without blemish. "We're immune to *Thanasis* now," she said. "We're made new, Roy."

The sunken red *Thanasis* scar was gone from his ankle. All of his other old scars were gone. He held her hands and looked on her beauty and believed her.

"We tried so long and hard to kill it," he said.

"It couldn't know that. To it death and decay are only vital changings," she said, smiling wonderfully. "This life never split apart, Roy. In wholeness there is nothing but love."

"Love is making a wholeness," he said. "I know about love now."

He told her about his visions.

"I had them too. We were diffused into the planetary consciousness."

"Do we still eat and drink and sleep . . . and all?"

She laughed. "Foolish Roy! Of course we do!" She pulled at his hands. "Come. I'll show you."

Hand in hand they ran to the pool. The gravel hurt his feet. Beside the pool stems had fused ringwall fashion into a series of connecting rooms like hollow cones. He followed Midori through them. They were clean and dry and silvery with shadows. Outside again she pointed out brownish swellings on various stems. She tore one open, the covering like thin paper, to reveal pearly, plum-sized nodules closely packed in a cavity. She bit one nodule in two and held the other half to his lips.

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"Try," she said.

He ate it. It was cool and crisp, with a delightful, unfamiliar flavor. He ate several more, looking at her in wonder.

"There are hundreds of these vesicles," she said. "No two of them ever taste the same. They're grown just for us."

He looked at her and around at the beauty of the gorge in strong, transmuted sunlight and he could not bear it. He closed his eyes and turned away from her.

"I can't. I can't, Midori," he said. "I ain't good enough for this."

"You are, Roy."

"You loved it before. But all I wanted was to kill it," he said. "Now it's done this for me." The feeling flooded him agonizingly. "I want to love it back and I can't. Not now. Not after. I just *can't,* Midori!"

"Roy. Listen to me." She was in front of him again, but he would not open his eyes. "This life emerged with infinite potentialities. It mastered its environment using only the tiniest part of them," she said. "It never split up, to fight itself and evolve that way. So it lay dreaming. It might have dreamed forever."

"Only we came, you mean? With *Thanasis?*"

"Yes. We forced it to changes, genetic recombination, rises in temperatures and process speeds. Whatever happened at one point could be duplicated everywhere, because it is all one. One year to it is like millions of years of Earthly evolution. It raised itself to a new level of awarness."

He felt her hand on his arm. He would not open his eyes.

"Listen to me, Roy! We *wakened* it. It knows us and loves us for that."

"Loves us for *Thanasis!*"

"It loves *Thanasis,* too. It conquered *Thanasis* with love."

'And me. Tamed. A pet. A parasite. I *can't,* Midori!"

"Oh no! Roy, *please* understand! It thinks us now, biochemically. Like each littlest phyto, we are thoughts in that strange mind. I think we focus its awareness, somehow, serve it as a symbol system, a form-giver. . . ." She lowered her voice. He could feel her warmth and nearness. "We are its thoughts that also think themselves, the first it has ever had," she whispered. "It is a great and holy mystery, Roy. Only through us can it know its own beauty and wonder. It loves and needs us." She pressed against him. "Roy, *look* at me!"

He opened his eyes. She smiled pleadingly. He ran his hands down the smooth curve of her back and she shivered. He clasped her powerfully. It was all right.

"I can love it back, now," he said. "Through you, I love it."

"I give you back its love," she whispered into his shoulder.

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Afterward, arms linked, dazed with their love, they walked down to the sea. They stood on sparkling sand and cool water splashed at their ankles.

"Roy, have you thought? We'll never be ill, never grow old. Never have to die."

He pressed his face into her hair. "Never is a long time."

"If we tire, we can be resorbed and diffuse through the planetary consciousness again. But that's not death."

"Our children can serve."

"And their children."

"It could do this for anybody now, couldn't it?" he asked her quietly.

"Yes. For any old or ill human who might come here," she said. "They could have youth and strength again forever."

"Yes." He looked up at the blue, arching sky. "But there's a rocket up there with a warning message, to scare them away. I wish. I wish they could know. . . ."

"That they are their own plague."

He patted her head to rest again on his shoulder.

"Someday they'll learn," he said.

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EDITORIAL

Lately, it seemed, we had been somewhat preoccupied with Neanderthals. First off, we read and reviewed William Golding's THE INHERITORS, which avid readers of our Books column will recall dealt with the death of the last of these. Next, we re-read Philip José Farmer's THE ALLEY GOD*, which told of the survival of the last Neanderthals into our time. Then we discussed the subject by letter with the venerable and magnificent George Alfred "Sarge" Smith, F.F.I., Curator for Archaeology at The Firelands Museum, Norwalk, Ohio. It was Curator's Smith's opinion that it is nonsense to assume Neanderthal Man was exterminated by *homo sapiens;* actually, the latter absorbed the former—and, inasmuch as blondness, curiously enough, is (in the Old World) found only where Neanderthal remains are found, it is seriously postulated that *homo neanderthalensis* is the progenitor of all blonds. Our wife also read these books and this correspondence; since she is blonde, too, we joshed her about it. Notwithstanding this preoccupation with the past we were currently both considerably preoccupied with the future as well, awaiting the arrival of our first-born. The event occurred at a hospital which allows fathers to be present in the delivery room, and you may imagine, then, with what emotions we watched as our wife gave birth to the most Neanderthal-looking infant boy it is possible to conceive: the child had a broad, snub nose, and a low and sloping forehead, with downy hair growing down to the eyes, along the shoulders, and down the spine. The child's mother observed all, perceptively and fondly. "I shouldn't have read that Farmer book and those others," she murmured. "Never mind, I think it's cunning, isn't he ugly, I love him." So did we; but felt impelled to discuss the matter with various well-wishers—Job's comforters, the lot of them. Prenatal influence? We inquired. A throw-back? What? "It isn't Phil Farmer," said Robert Heinlein; "it's *you*." And Robert Arthur's comment was, "Well, the human race is supposed to breed for survival, so maybe that's the next survival-type." We gazed—numbly, dumbly, devotedly—through the glass of the nursery where our perfectly paleolithic-looking

*Originally, *The Alley Man,* F&SF, June, 1959.

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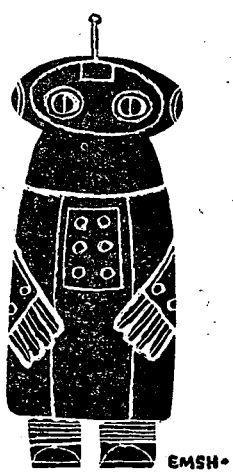
man-child was quartered, and whence we presently bore him home. We were (we pondered) the Father of a New Race. Even now, no doubt, the cave-bear was stirring, ready to throw off his age-long sleep . . . the sabre-tooth tiger . . . the wooly mammoth . . . the dire-wolf . . . What panic there would be as our effete civilization crumbled before their onslaughts! But we, ourself and our wife, and the parents of the other neo-Neanderthal children being born momently, we would be safe. Filled with atavistic know-how, our beetling bairns would throw back the Great Beasts—and give us marrow-bones to mumble as we cowered safely in the rear-most caves . . . Thus we reflected, and yet, as we did so, day by day, the child (we had thought it might be appropriate to name him Ab or Ug, but were chicken, and called him Ethan, instead) the child changed. He developed a forehead, and a bridge to his nose. The hair receded to conventional limits. He now looks and acts almost perfectly humanoid. We say, "almost"—his head is still bumpy, and he makes curious bird-like chirpings. What it all goes to prove, blessed if we know—unless, of course, the wisdom of that age-old saying, "Phrenology recapitulates ornithology."

—Avram Davidson



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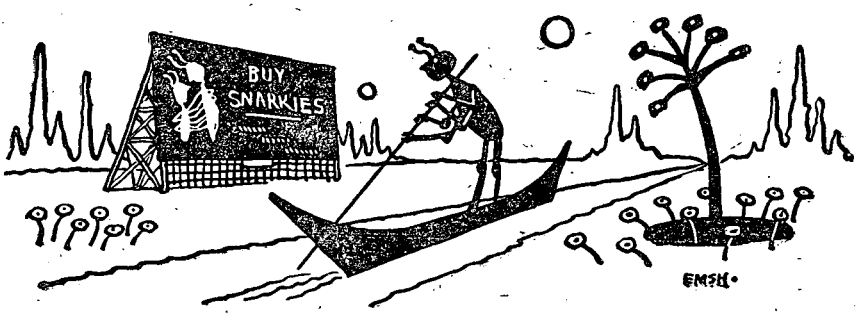

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